



# Children Not In School: A Community-based Perspective

**Research Data Collection and Findings from Community-based  
Organizations in Myanmar and Thailand**



**Partners Asia**



Linking Burma-Myanmar communities with global resources  
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## I. Introduction

Today in Myanmar, and among Myanmar migrant communities from Myanmar in Thailand, education is one human right that is still not accessible to many. There are a multitude of complicated issues that cause this inaccessibility. Most of these issues are interlinked with one another, making this particular situation far from black and white, but rather, a complex picture of grays. The following excerpt, taken from a report by The Women and Child Rights Project, does an excellent job of illustrating the situation:

“A child might self-identify as poor, indicating that income insecurity pushed her to work, but also explains that her father, the previous breadwinner, is sick and cannot access treatment because of high transportation costs to the hospital located 50 kilometers away. Some children trace the origin of their hardship to the death of a parent or the loss of family property to land confiscation or armed conflict, but also describe rampant joblessness and low wages in their new communities of residence. One 12-year-old girl [...] said she started working after completing primary school because her family could not afford to send her to the nearest middle school in a distant village, suggesting insufficient financial means and a failure of the education system’s reach. But she also described how the family was particularly hard hit after her father’s leg was injured by a landmine, leaving him unable to return to work. In this case, poor medical care and the vestiges of decades of civil war also play a role.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea for this report came from educational statistics that UNICEF published in their Myanmar Country Programme Overview 2011-2015 report. The report quoted government figures that showed primary school enrollment in Myanmar was approximately 87%, and that the literacy rate for 15-24 year-olds was approximately 95%.<sup>2</sup> Many community-based organizations working in these areas believed these numbers covered up a large and growing number of children not in school.

This study was undertaken by local teachers and members of community-based organizations, with support from Partners Asia, to learn more about children not in school both in Myanmar and across the border in Thailand. Through qualitative and participatory data collection tools and the help of secondary resources, this study aims to highlight not only who is not in school, but also the dynamics surrounding their lives and decision making.

## II. Background

Education has been a high priority in Myanmar for more than half a century. Since the country gained independence in 1948, every change in government has seen serious changes to the nation’s education system. In Dr. Thein Lwin’s paper, *Education in Myanmar (1948-2000)*, he breaks up the history of Myanmar’s education into four different parts: Education before Independence, Education after Independence, Education under Military Rule, and Education on the Wave of Democratization. He explains in great detail how the public education system under British rule had twelve years of education, but with three different types of schools; Burmese schools, English/Burmese schools, and English schools. Schools that taught English were considered of a

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<sup>1</sup> *Children For Hire: A Portrait of Child Labor in Mon Areas*. Publication. Bangkok: Women and Child Rights Project, 2013. Page 28. Print.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. *UNICEF Myanmar Country Programme Overview 2011-2015*. Rep. Yangon: UNICEF Myanmar, 2010. Page 11. Print.

higher quality than schools that only taught Burmese, and they were more expensive to attend, leading to socio-economic divides.

In 1948, after the country gained independence, the government altered the education structure by cutting the last two years of secondary school, and in doing so, shortening the system to ten years for a high school diploma. Burmese was introduced as the primary language of instruction in all public schools and English was a compulsory second language. In 1962, when the country came under a military dictatorship, there was a major shift in the curriculum within the education system. An emphasis was placed on subjects relating to science and art-related subjects became less valued. After the eighth grade, a nation wide exam was given and those who scored higher were put into an "A-list" and allowed to study science-related subjects. Students who scored low were placed on the "B-list" and were only allowed to study what was to be considered lesser subjects such as arts and social sciences. Upon graduating from the high school level, students were designated specific subjects to study at the university level, based on the results received on a final exam at the end of tenth grade.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-eighties, students from Myanmar's universities had begun organizing peaceful protests against the country's military dictatorship. Students marched in the streets of Rangoon and on their university campuses demanding democracy. The backlash from the government was extreme. Students were arrested, beaten, tortured, and killed. This resulted in student-led countrywide protest, escalating throughout the country until the government crackdown on August 8, 1988. This became known as the 8-8-88 Movement. Government troops opened fire on peaceful protesters for five days.<sup>4</sup> Many students were killed and many were forced to flee to the jungle along the Thai-Myanmar border, where they continued their struggle remotely.

As a result of The 8-8-88 Movement, the country transitioned from a dictatorship to absolute military rule. The ruling regime claimed that the country's education was not their responsibility, but that of the next elected government. The next elections resulted in the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, winning by a landslide. However, the military junta retained control of the country and never honored this victory. Over the past twenty-one years the quality and attendance rates of Myanmar's education system has suffered severely.

Many universities were closed following 1988 and only recently opened, with limitations. During the same time, the government allocated less than 2% of their national budget for education.<sup>5</sup> As a result of an underfunded education system, teachers were extremely underpaid, classrooms were underequipped, there was an insufficient number of middle and high schools in rural areas, and most schools were forced to rely on mandatory fees from parents to maintain school facilities and purchase classroom supplies.

In January of 2014, parliament voted to boost the education budget to 5.4%,<sup>6</sup> although some experts questioned whether this would actually be delivered.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Myanmar government created a committee to work on reforming the education system of the country, called The Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR). Even though these are steps in the right direction, the education system in Myanmar has yet to see any real change and the CESR is frequently criticized by the National Network for Education Reform (NNER) a civil society network of local

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<sup>3</sup> Lwin, Thein. "Education in Myanmar (1945-2000)." Diss. U of New Castle, 2000. Thinking Classroom Foundation. Retrieved on 18 October 2014 from [http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Education\\_in\\_Burma\\_%281945-2000%29.htm](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Education_in_Burma_%281945-2000%29.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Zaw, Aung. "The Hero's Daughter Returns." *The Face of Resistance: Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's Fight for Freedom*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mekong, n.d. 1-14. Print.

<sup>5</sup> *Where Change Has Yet To Reach*. Rep. Thailand: Earth Rights International, 2012. Page 9. Print.

<sup>6</sup> DVB. "Myanmar Budgets US\$110 Million for Education." *Democratic Voice of Myanmar*. N.p., 1 October 2014. Retrieved on 16 October 2014 from <http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/burma-budgets-us110-million-education>.

<sup>7</sup> Michaels, Samantha. "It's Balancing the Interests of Both Sides." *The Irrawaddy*. N.p., 22 October 2013. Retrieved on 17 October 2014 from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/interview/balancing-interests-sides.html>.

teachers, CBO's and NGO's. One of the NNER's biggest concerns is that the CESR does not including them or the country's teachers in the reform meetings.<sup>8</sup>

At the policy level, it would appear that Myanmar has a very progressive attitude towards education. They have signed many charters and passed many policies, including the Convention of the Rights of Children (CRC), which specifically calls for free, and accessible education for all children as well as vocational education.<sup>9</sup> This policy, along with others, in theory would help to boost the livelihood of children. Unfortunately somewhere along the way the implementation of these measures has been lost and the current reality in Myanmar is that many, especially those from lower social classes and in rural areas, still have extreme difficulties trying to access education.

Since 2012, Myanmar has received a lot of praise from the international community for the reforms the government has announced. Economic sanctions have been lifted and international business and development groups have begun to pour into the country. Many governments and international media outlets have applauded the new government for steps in the direction of internal peace and prosperity. However, the realities on the ground and attitudes inside the country, are very different. Most people, who don't belong to the upper social classes, have yet to feel very few positive effects of these reforms.

Myanmar is a country with a large amount of diversity. There are eight main ethnic groups, with over one hundred sub-ethnic groups. Each ethnicity is unique in that they have their own language, culture, history, and beliefs. For decades there has been conflict between the government military and ethnic militant groups who are fighting to retain autonomy of their ethnic identity and local regions. This conflict has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of villagers. Many have been forced to flee their home not only because of the violence and battles, but because of many pressures and abuses encountered by the villagers from the many sides of the conflict. To add to the already complicated situation, the largest ethnic group, for which the country is named, the Burman, have controlled the country's government since independence and the centralized education curriculum reflects this dominance. Many ethnic groups have major objections to the government's curriculum because it does not allow space for instruction of ethnic language, culture and history.

Some of the villagers who flee their homes because of the violence end up living in internally displaced persons camps (IDP camps) within Myanmar, or crossing the border to Thailand, China, India or Bangladesh to seek safety in refugee camps or live as migrant workers. Quality of life among this populations is extremely difficult and often education opportunities are extremely limited and quality is poor. In addition, many of these refugees, displaced persons and migrants are focused on day to day survival and ensuring their security from abuse, arrest, injury and illness.

Today, even in Thailand, it is very difficult for migrant students from Myanmar to attain accredited education. Even though Thailand boasts an Education For All (EFA) policy, promising education to any child in Thailand regardless of legal status, implementation of the EFA policy is weak. There are currently an estimated 150 migrant learning centers (MLCs) in Thailand that provide education to students from Myanmar. The problem is that neither Thailand nor Myanmar recognizes the education MLCs provide as legitimate. The result is students who graduate from MLCs receive a diploma that isn't recognized by universities or employers from either country, making social or economic mobility nearly impossible for this population.

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<sup>8</sup> Michaels, Samantha. "Myanmar's Govt Accused of Excluding Education Network From Reform Talks." *The Irrawaddy*. N.p., 5 March 2014. Retrieved on 1 October 2014 from <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burmas-govt-accused-excluding-education-network-reform-talks.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The United Nations. High Commission for Human Rights. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. N.p.: United Nations, 1989. Office of the High Commission for Human Rights. Retrieved on 17 October 2014 from <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

The Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) is an umbrella organization of MLC's, community based organizations, and local non-governmental organization. MEII was established in late 2012 with the purpose of creating a flexible standardized curriculum that will satisfy the needs of the Myanmar and Thai governments, as well as the ethnically diverse population of migrant students. At the time this report was written, MEII was organizing symposiums and seminars in Yangon, Bangkok, and along the Thai-Myanmar border, to host discussions among MLCs and government representatives from both country's. MEII has conducted extensive research to evaluate and compare the education systems of Myanmar and Thailand, identify similarities and advocate for collaboration by developing a framework for a standardized curriculum that can be used in MLCs in Thailand.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, there are many complicated reasons why children have difficulties attending school. In this report we have identified some of the many issues and boiled them down into four main categories, each with sub categories. The six categories identified were Economic Insecurities and the High Costs of Education, Current School Environments, Family Environments, and Migration. While we have taken the liberty to divide up the issues for the purpose of simplification, though it is critical to remember that these issues are inter-connected and do not stand along. Addressing any one alone will not be sufficient to bring about effective change to ensure Education for All.

### **III. Methodology**

This study was designed and undertaken by local community based organizations and teachers. Partners Asia provided trainings, technical support and facilitated a process of data analysis, report writing and recommendations.

#### **A. Aims**

The primary goal of this project was to recognize the large number of children in Myanmar and among migrant communities from Myanmar living in Thailand who are not in school. Through observations, interviews and focused group discussions with children, parents, teachers, and community organizers in both Myanmar and Thailand, this project documents the current situation for those who cannot access education and what barriers stand in their way. The hope is that this report can provide steppingstone to understand and create opportunities for learning and literacy to all children from Myanmar.

#### **B. Audience**

This research and report hopes to raise awareness among a wide range of stakeholders who should and could have a role to play in securing basic education for all children of Myanmar. This includes: government, civil society, international organizations, donors as well as parents, employers and children themselves.

#### **C. Site and Participants**

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<sup>10</sup> MEII Research Committee. *Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) Phase 2 Report*. Rep. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Migrant Education Integration Initiative, 2013. Print.

The research for this project was collected within Myanmar and also among migrants from Myanmar in Thailand.

In Myanmar, local partners conducted research in:

- Yangon - Insein, Hlaing Thar Yar, Thanlyin, Tharkayta and North Okkalapa
- Northern Shan State – Lashio and Thipaw, Musel
- Southern Shan State – Hopone and Nant San
- Eastern Shan State – Keng Tong
- Chin State – Kalay area
- Kachin State – Laizar
- Rakhine State – Sittway and Paut Taw
- Ayawaddy – Latputa

In Thailand, local partners conducted research in:

- Bangkok
- Chiang Mai
- Chumphon
- Mae Hong Song
- Phangnga
- Ranong

Five different types of people interviewed for this project:

- Children in school
- Children not in school
- Parents
- Teachers
- Community leaders

In Myanmar, a majority of the interviews were conducted in cities where there were street children and children working in teashops, after spending significant amounts of time developing comfortable relationships. Other interviews were conducted in rural areas.

In Southern Thailand, a large portion of the participants interviewed lived on various farm plantations or worked in factories. In Northern Thailand participants lived largely in rural areas.

## **D. Data Collection**

To collect data, researchers used four main methods: Observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory tools.

While collecting data, researchers would go out in teams of two or three people. There was always a designated note taker and a voice recorder operator, while one researcher conducted the interviews. Interviews were held in individual sessions and focused group interviews with communities, parents, and/or children. Researchers also conducted rapid assessment in schools

where they would create a space for children to participate in creative activities while the researchers conducted observations.

## **Primary Data**

Local partners were trained in data collection methods, developed their own semi-structured guidelines and collected the primary data of this study. Partners Asia supported local researchers throughout the data collection process and worked closely with them in developing their skills while relying on their networks and understanding of the local context, languages and cultures. In order to ensure that the researchers were equipped with the skills necessary to collect the data, two large group trainings were held both in Myanmar and Thailand with all the researchers collectively. Complimentary to these two big trainings, smaller trainings were given to researchers in their local areas.

In Myanmar, local partners collected data from September of 2013 to December 2014. In Thailand, local partners began collecting data from February to December 2014.

Researchers initially started with direct and participatory observations as a means of learning more about the community and particularly the context in which children not in school are residing.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were conducted and recorded in local languages and then later translated by documenters who participated in all stages of this research process.

In the last stage of data collection, researchers employed participatory data collection approaches directly with children. These included:

- Mind Mapping – Used to understand the thoughts and opinions of participants.
- Body Mapping – Used to monitor abuse or violations of participants bodies.
- Village Mapping – Used to evaluate general data from the community.
- Life Trees – Used to understand how participants live in the community harmonically and how they are treated.
- Value Lines – Used to find out what participants value in their lives.
- Time Lines – Used to find out the daily activities of participants.
- Stickers – Used to observe and understand the expressions and emotions of participants.
- Drawing, stickers and time lines.

## **Secondary Data**

An extensive amount of secondary data was used to compliment the primary data in order to provide a broader context for the findings of this research. Secondary data provides a historical context and also an understanding of the current educational, economical and political context in Myanmar today. The secondary sources used in this study were written by local community based organizations, international non-governmental organizations, news articles and academic papers.

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## **E. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were carefully considered in the formation of this research project and a priority reviewed by each team and in the trainings throughout the study. Researchers focused on three main ethical considerations: Consent, Security and Confidentiality.

- Consent - Researchers started data collections with consent forms. For those interviewees who were illiterate, the researcher verbally described all articles included in the consent form. Participants were also reminded during and at the end of each interview or group discussion that the information would only be used in this study and without any names or contact information. They were also asked if they wanted to retract any information. In some places, researchers had to make written agreements in advance with local authorities but were then able to gather data independent of their presence and did not share any raw data collected.
- Security - Researchers took every measure to ensure the safety of participants and secure places were chosen for with their agreement.
- Confidentiality – All researchers kept two notebooks; one for data all coded without names or contact information and the other for detailed notes. This assured that no data could be traced to any person or place. Both books were kept separately at all times and stored in locked storage to ensure confidentiality.

The researchers were also very careful to dress according to the local context and also to choose the appropriate local language.

## **F. Implementation Strategy**

All of the findings collected in Myanmar were sent to Partners Asia (PA) Yangon office. The data from Ayawaddy division were sent by hard copies. Other groups sent soft copies through email. In Chin, Kachin, Ayawaddy, and Eastern Shan, interviews were conducted in local languages. Therefore, those researchers translated the interviews into Burmese and sent the transcripts to PA's office. After receiving the data, PA transferred it to two documenters translated all the data into English.

In Thailand, data collection was done in many local languages, but transcribed into the written languages of Thai or Burmese. The data was then sent to Thammasat University where documenters were based during the data collection period to translate all data into English.

To avoid translation errors, the two translators would regularly contact the researchers to confirm that they had proper translations. In addition, the documenters participated in all stages of this research project and often accompanied researchers to their data collection sites.

Three research review meetings were held in Yangon and two in Bangkok. This allowed the researchers a chance to share their data collection experiences, challenges and learnings. In those meetings, the researchers designed their action plan. During these meetings, the documenters also had opportunities to clarify their translation with the researchers.

## **G. Analysis and Dissemination Strategy**

Once all interviews were completed and translated, they were given to the research assistant to provide a first draft of the analysis. The research assistant used an excel spreadsheet to record as much quantitative data about the interview as possible, including: date, location, sex, age, number of years studied, currently enrolled or not, profession, religion, and number of children. Qualitative data was organized into categories for report writing using the software, Hyper-Research. The author adjusted some interviews in order to represent the interviewee in the first person and to make the interview grammatically correct, while making sure to stay true to the original translation.

Upon completion of the analysis and first draft of the research findings, a review of the draft was undertaken among key researchers and documenters in both Myanmar and Thailand. Their input was incorporated into this final report. The research recommendations were also finalized during this process.

## **H. Obstacles and Limitations**

The greatest obstacle researchers faced was language due to the fact that they collected data from so many different ethnic populations. In cases where the researchers did not speak the local language, local interpreters had to be found. Though researchers sought to provide training of the translators prior to data collection it was limited and was a barrier at times. However, the research team spoke the vast majority of languages among them and translators were not required often.

Sometimes the researchers had to take time to get permission from local authorities who did not have awareness about the issues of the research.

In some sites, some of the researchers were falsely accused of religious persuasion because the researchers' religion was different from the majority of community.

Most of the children interviewed were working children. Therefore it was difficult to make appointments around their schedules. During the growing seasons, it was difficult to conduct interviews with children who were working in the fields. When the researchers would ask to talk to their employers, the children would usually become nervous and seemed to be afraid of losing their job. This often made it difficult to have extended periods of time with working children.

Transportation was another obstacle. Most of the participants were located in rural, hard to reach, areas.

Some interviewees asked what they would be receiving from us. They would expect to receive compensation from the researchers. However, researchers did not give incentives or compensation to any of the interviewees.

Although, there were many obstacles and limitations, this study was able to gather a great deal of first hand information about the realities and dynamics surrounding children not in school.

## IV. FINDINGS

The findings of this study have been organized around four themes: 1. Economic Insecurity and the Cost of School; 2. School Environment; 3. Family Environment and 4. Migration.

### 1. Economic Insecurity and the Cost of School

Due to the lack of funding, most schools in Myanmar rely on fees paid by parents to maintain operations. In addition, most often teachers also rely on after school tuition classes to subsidize their income. Officially primary school tuition is free yet student's families are responsible to pay for textbooks, uniforms, classroom materials and school maintenance. The CIA World Fact Book estimates that approximately 32% of Myanmar's citizens live below the poverty line of by sustaining on US\$1.25 or less per day.<sup>11</sup> However, if we were to use the World Bank's poverty line of US\$2.25 per day, 85% of the country would be considered to be living in poverty.<sup>12</sup>

Some aspect of economic insecurity causes almost every one of the issues identified in this study and is the major factor in most household decisions including children's education. This section will highlight the economic hardships families face and the restrictive costs that come with accessing school for children in Myanmar and from Myanmar in Thailand. In a lot of cases, survival is the main priority of a family and education becomes a luxury many cannot afford.

Two thirds of Myanmar's population live in rural areas<sup>13</sup> and many of the country's poor are farmers who struggle to make enough to support large families, or day laborers who live off of daily wages and face a lack of job security. For the children of farmers who don't own their own land and have to work on other people's plantations, education is nearly impossible to access.<sup>14</sup> In some cases cyclone Nargis destroyed the family's home and business, leaving them little or no option but to migrate in search of work. A common theme in families who face economic hardships is that because of their situation, some or all of the children among these populations find it close to impossible to go attend school.

*We have moved from Pyin Salu Village because of Nargis cyclone. Our business is not good and we have to move to where we can work. I have six children. Their education is just a consequence since we have many family members and have to move always in search of work. After Nargis cyclone, their education was ruined since we have to move for our work.*

#### **A parent of six children from Pyin Salu Village, Myanmar.**

*There are three students who have to stop because of family problems. One girl is in eighth grade, her younger brother is in seventh grade and the youngest is in fifth grade. All of them have to stop their education because their father can't financially support them as he has no income. They have stopped*

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<sup>11</sup> "World Fact Book: Myanmar." *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, 23 June 2014. Retrieved on 17 October 2014 from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Bissinger, Jared. *From Natural Resources to Human Capital: Practical, Feasible, Immediate Resourcing Solutions for Myanmar's Children*. Rep. N.p.: UNICEF, 2013. Page 3 Print.

<sup>13</sup> McCornac, Dennis. "Income Inequality in Myanmar." *The Democratic Voice of Myanmar*. The Democratic Voice of Myanmar, 22 October 2013. Retrieved on 2 December 2014 from <http://burmatimes.net/income-inequality-in-burma/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Children For Hire: A Portrait of Child Labor in Mon Areas*. Publication. Bangkok: Women and Child Rights Project, 2013. Page 26. Print.

*their education for three years. They feel sad and shy for being uneducated. They still want to continue their education.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about three school age siblings in Myanmar.**

*Our community also struggles because we have no health care, no transportation, no electricity, and not enough income. Our only work is farming and foraging in the forest. It's not enough to provide food for our families.*

**A male migrant community leader from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I'm not healthy, even though I am only 13 year-olds. I live in a small village without a health clinic, electricity, or a school. I still want to go to school if my parents would let me continue my education. The main reason my parents stopped my education was because they have a very low income, which can't cover the necessary needs of our family. There is only first grade in our village taught by a volunteer. I want to be a teacher in the future to give back to my village.*

**A 13 year-old girl who is a migrant from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son region of Thailand.**

*I am eight years old, and I was enrolled to grade one. Now I have to look after my four year-old and one year-old younger sisters. Our parents separated due to financial difficulties in the household. My mother has to go to work from 5am in the morning to 4pm. Sometimes, my mother would return home earlier at 3pm depending on the work. Before, my mother used to leave my youngest sister in day care for about US\$60 per month. However, due to financial difficulties she had to stop sending me to school, so I could help look after my siblings and help with the housework. I plan on going back to school again next year. Even though, now I have to look after my younger sisters and I also have to do the housework such as doing the dishes, buying food, and cleaning the house. Sometimes, I get scolded and hit by my mother. Sometimes, bruises, wounds, and hand marks can be seen on my face and body.*

**An 8 year-old girl from Myanmar who lives in Thailand.**

*I am 11 years old and I went to school only until grade four. I am the eldest daughter amongst four siblings. Due to financial difficulties in the family, my siblings and I had to quit the school. All of us are willing to continue our studies, however our parents could no longer support us to do so.*

**An 11 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I am 18 years old and I work at one of the snack factories. My dream is to be a designer. I am so sad for not completing my education. I face a lot of difficulties because of my limited education. I face so many difficulties in my work place. I think that Myanmar children are not getting education because of the economic hardships in Myanmar. I always dreamed of attending a university in Myanmar. But my dream was broken by economic hardships and the limited opportunities for education in Myanmar.*

**An 18 year-old girl who is a migrant from Myanmar living in Samut Sakorn, Thailand.**

*I completed fourth grade, but I haven't been in school for many years now. My father said he couldn't financially support me anymore and requested I help him work on the farm. I still wish to go back to school, but I've never told my father because I'm afraid of him. My father is a salt porter. He doesn't give money to the house. My mother is a launderer. I get pocket money US\$0.05 a day.*

*I buy snack with that. I don't want to survive by working in the fields. My interest is to have a small business like a shop for selling and trading goods. When I look at my friends who have had a chance to study in other villages, I feel really sad and want to be like them. I can see how important and effective education is for all people.*

**A male teen from Myanmar living and working on a farm in Thailand.**

*I have six family members including my daughters, sons and husband. Our main problem is occupation and family incomes. One of my children is attending the school until third grade. She still wants to attend the school, but her father and I can't do any things for her school fees. Therefore, she doesn't have anymore chance to attend school. So I asked her to stay back and work together with me and her father.*

**A mother from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son region of Thailand.**

The poverty in Myanmar alongside temporary and/or unstable employment results in many families unable to send their children to school.

### 1.1 Internal Migration

Given the vulnerability of farmers and lack of employment in rural areas, many adults leave to find work as daily laborers and are forced to travel to where work is available. In many cases, this means that parents must travel to far off in towns in search of employment, creating an unstable living environment for the children. This directly impacts the child and their ability to access or receive a consistent education.

*My parents are daily wage farmers and because of that, they always have to move from one place to another, wherever suitable work is available for them. I left school when I was in fourth grade. I had to move with my parents to village after village. Finally I dropped out, even though I really wanted to attend.*

**A 10 year-old Pa'O girl from Southern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*The mother had to work in a town far away. Six months after she left the father went to the town to get a job also. They had two children and one was studying in third grade and one in kindergarten. Their Aunt sent them to go live with their parents. Then the children had to leave school and live alongside their parents who were working in Bago as road construction workers.*

**An observation from a researcher in a Karen village in Laputta Township, Myanmar.**

*There are two children who were studying at the Non Formal Education Center. They could not go to school anymore because of internal migration. We found out on one of our home visits that their families were homeless, and squatting in various abandoned houses. They also said that they had to move very soon because they were constantly harassed by the local government officials.*

**An observation from a researcher in a non-formal education center outside of Yangon, Myanmar.**

*After Cyclone Nargis, many businesses became ruined and families had to move to where they could work. Since that time, many children were no longer able to attend school.*

**An observation from a researcher in Dawbon Township, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*There a lot of migrant workers living near my ward. At the beginning of the school year, we receive about 100% of the students. After the middle of the school year, we lose about 10% of the students. By the end of the school year, we have lost about another 15% of the students. Their parents had to move around according to where they could find jobs. The jobs they did find were unstable and some jobs were seasonal. Some were working as day laborers, some as vendors or construction workers. They would have to rent a house which costs at least US\$30 per month. They had to move from place to place depending on which job they have been offered. Some times they have to move because they could not afford to rent the house and they had to find another house which was affordable for them. All these factors affected children's ability to attend school*

**A Monk from a monastic school in North Ohaklar, Myanmar.**

## 1.2 Working Children

Economic Insecurity can cause parents to rely on their children to earn income to support the family. Poor families often resort to asking their children to leave school and work to help aid the family. Sometimes this can take the form of forced child labor, some of the time the child, although reluctant, is willing, and sometimes the child chooses to leave school in order to earn an income in order to help the family.

In some cases children were asked to take up a paying job such as selling things in a shop, working in factory, on a farm, or even collecting garbage and recycling. Other times children were asked to help out with family chores, such as house maintenance, looking after siblings, washing dishes, or helping out on the family farm or in the family shop.

*I was ten years old and I had attended up to grade 1. My parents are farmers who have to work on others' farms, because we don't have our own land. I have four siblings and all of my siblings have had a chance to attend school except me. I was a second oldest son and my mother asked me to drop out from school when I was attending the first grade.*

**A male youth who works in a school canteen in Myanmar.**

*That young boy works at purified water shop in the market. His responsibility is to carry 20 liters of purified drinking water to bring to apartments. His partner is an adult. They take turns carrying the bottles. Some customers' apartments are six, seven and eight floors up where there is no elevator. The boy's face is faded and his old T-shirt is faded as well. He wears sport shorts and his clothes are a little wet because of the water and sweat. The bottles seem way too heavy for him. He finished only fifth grade. Now he lives with his aunt.*

**An observation from a researcher about a young boy in Myanmar.**

*In this amusement park, I work with toy machines. The machines are animal structured and made especially for younger children under the age of five. I am responsible for operating four animal-like machines, one small electromagnetic train and two small merry-go-rounds. I am small but I can run the machines well. My other main responsibility is to take care of the children's safety. I have to hold the children sometimes. There are no chairs for me to sit while I work. I have to stand the whole time. I get 35\$ per month and I have to pay 20\$ to the amusement park for food. The amusement park prepares food for us. I finished seventh grade in my native town. I started working here three months ago. I work ten hours a day every day of the week.*

**A male youth from Myanmar who works in an amusement park.**

*When their primary education is over, most of the children are work as cattle boys, in the restaurant as waiters or in various workshops. They work hard, long hours and get very low pay.*

**A direct observation from a researcher of youth in a village in Myanmar.**

*I work in a canteen at one of the universities in Yangon. I am Karen. I have worked there for three years. There are other teenagers at my work. The place where I work is clean and has good hygiene. I am a waiter. My workplace is safe. My boss is a single man who is a little bit short tempered. He sometimes scolds the waiters in his shop. I am from Taik Gyi Township. I have four siblings. I am the eldest son of my family. my younger brothers and sisters are with my parents in Taik Gyi. I finished grade three. I go back to my parents two months a year, on university holidays. I am happy in my work. I can speak Karen. I have to work six days a week. I go to church and attend Sunday School.*

**A teenage boy from Taik Gyi, Myanmar, working in a university canteen in Yangon.**

*I watched a boy, about nine years old, herding the ducks at the field. He is wearing old pale clothes. He is wearing long boots, a long shirt and a big hat. Beside the field is the main road. It is noisy with the voices of cars and motorbikes. There is a lot of dust in this environment. No one looks at the boy when they pass by. He herds the ducks to escape from the danger of cars and motorbikes. He is holding a long bamboo stick. His face is a little depressed. I see there is a mud in his long boots. He explained that he is not happy to do this job and finds it difficult, but he has to be patient. He said he had never attended school.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about a thirteen year-old boy from Keng Tong, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*A girl wearing dirty clothes, who is about 10 years old, is herding buffaloes in a field. She is dirty with mud and water from the field. Under a tree she is plucking leaves and playing with them. Her mom is calling her to come back. The girl doesn't come the first time so her mom becomes angry and tells her daughter, "Deaf girl let's go home! We have to carry the water." She is pulling the buffaloes with a sad face as she goes back. The girl doesn't attend school.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about a young girl from Keng Tong, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*Beside the main road, in the three-story building, the girl, six years old, works as a housemaid. She is the Ah Kar ethnic. She is wearing old clothes. Her parents were very poor so they left her in this building and take her salary each month. I see that she is very young so she doesn't understand how to do the household chores so the owner of the house scolds her often.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in Myanmar of a six year-old girl.**

*We have one basic middle school (to grade 8). Even though there was a school on our block, there are some kids who can't go to school. Their parents do not have a good job and now their children have to work with no chance of attending the school. These children have to work from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Some of the youth work at the factory packing the snacks, or on corn farms. The whole day they sit and work. If they didn't have work some days at the snack package factory, they have to find another job to do.*

**A researcher's observation of their own community in Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

*My parents don't force me to do this job. I decided by myself. I don't know what to do except this job. Since I failed the matriculation exam, I didn't try to take the exam again. Now I am just working to support or help my mom. My father passed away since I was five years old.*

**A male youth who works as a motorbike courier in Myanmar.**

*I left school three years ago and now I am thirteen years old. I can't write correctly but I know how to read. When I see young boys with school uniforms, I am envious. I really want to go to school. My wish is to stay with my family in the village but over the last six months, my mother made a three-year contract with a teashop owner for me to work as a waiter there. The shop owner transfers my wages to my mom every three months. Since I am the youngest boy here, most of the others bully me very often. Actually, I am more interested in mechanics than working in the teashop because most of the teenagers in our village work as mechanics.*

**A 13 year-old boy working in a teashop in Insein Township, Myanmar.**

*A seventeen year-old boy works in one of the cemeteries in Yangon. He has worked there for three years. He says his work is not very tiring, but he has to work mostly on sunny days. He wears dirty clothes. There is a lot of cement on his clothes and his body. He walks around the cemetery barefoot. When the weather is sunny, the cemetery is very dry and hot. When the weather is rainy, the whole cemetery is wet and sometimes it floods. I asked him a few questions. The whole family has moved to Yangon and they all work in the cemetery. There are five people in his family. He finished Grade four.*

**A 17 year-old boy from Thone Kwa Township working in a cemetery outside Yangon, Myanmar.**

*I am a waiter at a teashop. I am the eldest child in my family. I have a brother and a sister. I resigned from school one year ago. I was in grade four. I want to study but I have to support my brother's and sister's education. I have both a father and a mother. They both are farmers. They plant onions and garlic. I still want to go to school. I also have a desire to support the education of my brother and sister.*

**A 13 year-old boy from Kyaw Saw Village, Myanmar.**

*I am fifteen years old. I have two sisters and two younger brothers. I am the second son. I have been out of school for five years and work with my parents in the field. I want to earn money so I came to Lashio in August two years ago. I now work at a teashop. I live and eat at the teashop. I send my salary to my parents. I am happy I can earn money to support my family.*

**A 15 year-old boy living in Lashio, Myanmar.**

*I am 16 years old. I live with my parents and work as a domestic worker. My working hours are from 9 to 12. I work two days in a week. The main work I do is washing and ironing. I finished school at grade 5.*

**A 16 year-old girl from Hlaing Thar Yar, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*In the village some children are attending school but some don't because they don't have money. Those children help on farms and with household chores. My elder brother attended school up to Grade 4 and then had to leave school. As a nun, I can attend school at the Monastery.*

**A 14 year-old girl living in a nunnery in Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**



*I have five siblings and I am the middle one. My sisters got married. And my brother is too young to work. So my parents asked me not to go to school. At that time, I was in fifth grade and I always got A's. I do not want to stay out of the school. I want to continue education.*

**A 17 year-old girl who completed school up to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in Myanmar.**

*My friends are mostly picking green tea leaf. Most are out from school.*

**A 12 year-old girl from a nunnery in Myanmar.**

Sometimes a child traveled to Thailand to seek work that can help support older relatives. Many traveled with family members, but some reported traveling across the border alone.

*My son is 12 years old and does not study. He wakes up at 6am, the same time as me. He helps me with household chores, have breakfast and leave for work with me in the fields.*

**A 33 year-old mother from Myanmar who works on a Lychee plantation in Thailand.**

*I see two children, a girl and a little boy, playing together. The girl is thirteen years old, and the little boy, her younger cousin, is two years old. The boy is the son of her aunt; and the girl is staying with them. I ask the girl, "Don't you want to go to school?" She replied, "Yes sister, I want to go to school." Then I said, "If you want to go to school then tell your aunt." And she replied, "Then there will be no one to look after my younger brother." The girl also told me, "If I could go to school, that would be so much fun, with so many friends at school!" and she told me that she doesn't have any friends right now. The girl is very eager to go to school.*

**An observation from a researcher about a 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I went to the shop intending to buy some snacks. There were five female sales assistants in the shop, and one of them is the girl that left the Swe Kyat School six months ago. She is 14 years old. She had to leave school and work because she is the eldest daughter amongst her sibling and her parents are having financial difficulties and struggling for their survival.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about a 14 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I left the school in the fifth grade. My family has five members. I am the second daughter of the family. Even though I was doing well in my study, my parents were having financial difficulties, I had to quit school. I am working in one of the factories in Ranong. I have to work from 6am in the morning until 9pm. Sometimes, when there is overtime work, I come back at 11 pm. Sometimes, when I have to return home late and can't wake up and go to work the next morning, my mother scolds me.*

**A 12 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I am fifteen years old. I left the school at seventh grade. I am the youngest among three siblings. I was an outstanding student at school I am talented in art. However, since my parents were getting old I had to leave school and work in order to support them. I work in one of the food processing and freezing factories.*

**A 15 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I was in school back in Myanmar and had to drop out before completing sixth grade. Due to some problems between my parents, I grew up under the care of my grandparents. While I was at school, my mother and older sister supported me for the school fees. However, at sixth grade I left school and came to Ranong, Thailand, to work, in order to support my grandparents, and help ease the financial difficulties faced by my mother and older sister. Now I am working in one of the food processing and freezing factory.*

**A 14 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*When my sister had a baby, I had to stop schooling at the monastery. I traveled to Thailand to take care of the baby because her sister and brother-in-law have to work to earn money for the family.*

**An 11 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Kanchanaburi province, Thailand.**

This study found it difficult to collect data on the significant population of homeless children, especially in Yangon and across the Myanmar's border in Thailand. All researchers were very aware of their presence and often the gangs around them that made it difficult to reach out or even stay nearby to observe them. These children relied largely on begging and trash and recycling collecting.

*Somewhere in Insein Township, beside the main road, there are two streets of children with big sacks on their shoulders. They are looking around and searching for some litter like plastic or water bottles. Their eyes are moving rapidly everywhere and they are dressed in dirty and torn clothes. There are a lot of sores and scabs on their faces. They are walking bare foot, under the hot sun and are also sweating a lot.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about two street children in Insein Township, Myanmar.**

*I am thirteen years old. I have only attended grade one. My father is a salt porter in industrial ward. My mother sews the net in Dagon. I am living with my elder brother. My brother and I collect litter.*

**A 13 year-old boy from Dawbon Township, Myanmar.**

*I am eleven years old. I have two siblings. My younger brother and I live with my parents. We have been staying here in the city for three years. I've haven't been to school since I was young. My father said that there was no one else to work with him and I am the eldest one. My mother has been ill for three months. I am working alone to collect plastic and cans. My father goes around the town and buys and sells cans and papers that are old.*

**An 11 year-old boy from Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

### 1.3 Educational Costs

Unfortunately, for the citizens of Myanmar and for most of Myanmar's citizens living in Thailand, education is not free. For those who are able to manage economically and try to keep their children in school, they face the ongoing challenge of unpredictable school fees. Because of the extremely small amount of national budget that is allocated to public schools in Myanmar, schools depend on fees the parents pay to keep their programs running.<sup>15</sup> Common costs associated with school include school maintenance fees, the costs for textbooks and uniforms, special events and the cost of travel.

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<sup>15</sup> Bernstein, Danielle. "Suffer the Children." *Asia Times Online*. N.p., 6 November 2010. Retrieved on 3 October 2014 from [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/LK06Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LK06Ae02.html).

In some cases school fees can add up to be US\$50 per month, which would be approximately 75% of the income of a family living on 2.25 per day while working 30 days a month.<sup>16</sup> Currently 80% of the country earns this or less. In most families there are more than one child, which increases the difficulty for parents to send their children to school while struggling to meet day-to-day necessities.

*There are two girls who have been learning in our center since the start of this year. Their parents are working for the municipal and they just live in the municipal compound. Their mother said that she sent her children to the school, but the headmaster did not accept them. He said it is unlikely she will be able to afford the costs like school uniforms and providing lunch box. If so, the children would have problems. So, she sent her children to our center to study.*

**A 35 year-old teacher, teaching in a non-formal education center in Yangon, Myanmar.**

*I couldn't afford for my daughter to continue her education. There are so many fees and financial requests. I have four children and their father has been dead for two years. So, I will send my daughter to her aunty to help her work.*

**A mother in a Karen village, Lapputa Township, Ayawaddy Myanmar.**

*I have not got any shoes and warm-clothes. My mother collects some cans and bottles. My father passed away. We live in the nearby pagoda. I am a first grade student. My school is outside the city. My cousin and I can't attend school because our parents can not afford the school uniforms.*

**A male youth begging on the street in Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

*My uncle called me to the nunnery school. I didn't have money to attend the school in village so I come here. There is a primary school in my village up to grade four. I would like to go to that school, but my family cannot afford the fees. I want to continue my education to high school so I come here.*

**A youth who is not currently in school because they have to work, from, Mu Sel, Myanmar.**

*I left school since I was grade six because the school fees became so high. The regular school fees are not too much but there were always requests for extra fees*

**A female youth from Hlaing Thar Yar, Myanmar.**

*My father works at the tea shop and makes the snacks. I have four siblings. I want to attend the school but my parents can't afford it.*

**A 12 year-old boy from near Mandalay, Myanmar.**

*It costs a lot for my older sister to attend school in Lashio. So I have difficulty to continue my education as my parents cannot afford all the fees.*

**A 13 year-old girl from a nunnery in Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

*When I attend the school I never fail. I can study well. I want to continue to attend school. But, my family can't effort the fees so, I had to drop out from school. My ambition is to become a businesswoman.*

**A 17 year-old girl from a nunnery in Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

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<sup>16</sup> *Where Change Has Yet To Reach*. Rep. Thailand: Earth Rights International, 2012. Page 62. Print.

*In our community, 50 children attend school, but there is still around 20% who are unable to attend. Most of children want to study, but their parents can't support their school fees. We have two teachers from the government, but they don't put much effort into teaching, and the community is responsible for providing all the teacher's food and school materials.*

**A migrant community leader from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I still want to support my children to continue their education to be educators but it cost a lot, therefore they will need to stop school this year.*

**A 44 year-old mother from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son region of Thailand.**

A lot of children and parents interviewed shared that costs of attending school are even higher when a student enters high school. It is at this point where a substantial amount of students dropout of school. Some students have reported that the attendance costs tripled for high school and that many who can attend at these levels have financial support coming from family members working in foreign countries.<sup>17</sup>

*I left school because I could not get a transfer certificate from where I lived in my village. This school asks me to pay money for a transfer certificate and my parents also could not pay. The school, where I live now, does not allow me to attend grade three because I do not have transfer certificate and they let me attend only in the kindergarten class. At that time, I feel very sorrowful and wanted to cry when I saw other children going to school because I also want to go like them.*

**A female youth working in a cashew nut factory in Thanlyin, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*In the village school I had to pay US\$50 to attend eighth grade. Only people who have money can attend the school. My parents wanted me continue my education, but they can't afford the school fees so I came to this nunnery.*

**A fourteen year-old girl from Man Tong Township, Myanmar.**

*I have to attend grade 10 this year because I have already finished grade 9. I really want to attend the school, but I can't because my parents can't financially support me to attend the school. They couldn't do anything for me. Now, I always send my salary to my family. I really want to attend the school.*

**A male teen from Nyatmauk, Myanmar living and working in Thailand.**

*In Myanmar, children go to school without difficulties but when they get to the secondary level, they cannot afford to go to school because of school charges such as occasional fees and funds. Students cannot afford to pay because of the poverty of their parents. According to the situation of Myanmar people, they send their children to school at the primary level without discrimination. When they get to the secondary level, mostly girls stop their education because of economic hardships. The elder child has to drop out of school and help their parents in domestic works and economics. So they drop out from the school and find a job. It leads to child labor.*

**A mother from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

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<sup>17</sup> *Children For Hire: A Portrait of Child Labor in Mon Areas*. Publication. Bangkok: Women and Child Rights Project, 2013. Page 39. Print.

*I have a cousin at home. My cousin is 14 years old. She just attended until grade 9 because she was not supported anymore. She had to dropout and she is helping my mother with housework. Her father died when she was a baby. Her mother is in a second marriage now with a new family in another town. Her mother doesn't support her anymore. So, I am encouraging her to come to work in Thailand.*

### **A young woman from Myanmar in Mae Hong Son Thailand**

This study was unable to attain any data on exactly how many children are not in school or register but drop out early. However, the researchers found that there are many children out of school as well as decreasing numbers of students in the classroom as the grade levels progress.

## **2. The Current School Environment**

Even when families are able to overcome economic hurdles, there are other barriers preventing them from accessing education. While being severely under-funded, public schools are unable to meet the need for education in Myanmar and provide quality and accessible learning spaces for a large number of students. It can be very difficult for students who live in rural areas to access school, some having to travel great distances in order to do so. If students are able to travel the long distance to school, or are lucky enough to have a school facility close by, they are often times met with underequipped classrooms, libraries, learning materials and teachers.<sup>18</sup>

### **2.1 Facilities**

Not having a school nearby was one of the most common findings during the research phase of this report. An expert on education in Myanmar stated that in border areas, the school to village ratio is as low as one in twenty-five. It was often reported to us that there is a serious lack of education past primary school available within a close proximity. There are very few middle schools available to rural villagers, and even fewer high schools.

*Transportation is another challenge for children to access the education. In remote areas, not every village has a school. The students have to take the time to travel to school. For middle schools and high schools, they have to board in the nearest town to access education. In the rainy season, the flooded roads and streets give them a lot of difficulties when trying to go to school. Even if they arrive at school, the teachers are usually absent.*

### **An observation from a researcher who is working as teacher trainer in Myanmar.**

*In the village there are two shops, one primary school, one Christian church and one pagoda. We have no health care center, no tea shop, no pawn shop and no bars. When children want to continue their education they must move to larger towns which have a lot of distractions and costs.*

### **A direct observation by a researcher about a Christian Karen village in Myanmar.**

*The village has only one primary school, so they have to send their children to the town for the further education. It costs a lot. Some people aren't interested in that so some students don't continue their education.*

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<sup>18</sup> Lwin, Thein. *The Educational Cost of Army Rule in Myanmar*. Rep. Oslo: Norwegian Church Aid / Norwegian Myanmar Council, 2000. Print.

**A direct observation from a researcher in a Karen village in Lapputa, Myanmar.**

*I have five family members. I have one older brother and two younger brothers. My parents are doing cultivation and make charcoal. My brother doesn't do anything. One younger brother is attending primary school. Now he is in second grade. There is no one to help my parents at home. Even if I stayed in school I could only attend eighth grade in my village.*

**A fifteen year-old girl from Nam Kham Township, Myanmar.**

*There is only a school up to fourth grade in my village. For fifth grade we have to attend in Man Sent where there is a school that goes up to eighth grade. For tenth grade we have to attend 105 Miles Nunnery and live as a nun.*

**A sixteen year-old girl from Man Ton Township, Myanmar.**

*One of my sisters is in sixth grade and another one is in third grade. My parents wanted me to get an education so they sent me to the 105 Mile Nunnery. There is only up to fourth grade in the village. My parents come and meet me once a year. They give me pocket money. If they come, they stay for a few hours and then go back.*

**A thirteen year-old girl from Kutkai Township, Myanmar.**

*My brother brings me to this school with his motorbike. It takes us two days to come to 105 Miles Nunnery from our village. We have to sleep one night in Nam Kham. My aunt told my brother to bring here. We can only study to eighth in my village.*

**An eighteen year-old Palaung girl from Man Ton Township, Myanmar.**

*In Nam Kham we can learn to tenth grade but it's not good. The teachers can't work full time. We have to walk one and half hour to Nam Kham School to attend the school. With motorbike it takes 30 minutes.*

**A thirteen year-old Palaung girl in Myanmar.**

*When I attend the school nearest my village, I had to walk three hours each way to reach the school and return home.*

**A fourteen year-old Palaung girl from Man Ton Township, Myanmar.**

*I have seven siblings. I have two younger brother, three older brothers and one older sister. My younger brothers are still attending school. One is studying in seventh grade and the other is studying fourth grade both of them have to live elsewhere to go to school. I also went away for school. I am passing to ninth grade. My elder brothers and sister have never been to school. My family did not have money or contacts to send them to school.*

**A seventeen year-old youth from Man Ton Township, Myanmar.**

*At my village, there is only primary education. If we finish primary education we have to go to Nant Pat Kar to continue education. I doubt my parents will be able to afford to send me there.*

**A twelve year-old girl from Kutkai Township, Myanmar.**

This problem of an insufficient number of schools is not unique to Myanmar. Migrants from Myanmar living in Thailand reported the same problem.

*I'm currently responsible for community issues and development projects in thirty villages throughout the Kayan region. This area faces many challenges especially regarding education. Education is necessary for everyone, but within the villages I oversee, there is only one high school that was started last year. Unfortunately, its quality isn't very good, but at least our children have some place to study. We also have four middle schools and fourteen primary schools. The majority of villages have no school, but some have an informal teaching system for primary education provided by a volunteer from a local community organization. In addition, most communities simply have no useable building to study in even if there were teachers and support.*

**A 34 year-old community leader from Myanmar working with the Kayan across the border from Thailand.**

*I have never been in school. Growing rice, chilies, vegetables are my occupation to survive. I have six family members. I mostly have to work for my family and we live in a small village. There is no school in our village. Even now there is only one volunteer from a local community organization who can only teach one or two classes per week as there are a lot of children to rotate and not enough teachers. I have one child who is currently studying in the village and the other two I have to send to other villages to continue their school.*

**A 44 year-old mother from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son, Thailand.**

*I really feel sad for my children, but as you know, here there is no middle school and we can't support my daughter to go to other villages or towns. Even for her younger brothers and sisters we can't support their school fees either. They will also just finish primary school if we still have a primary school in our village.*

**A mother from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son, Thailand.**

*I have stopped my education for five years because of there is no school and no teachers in my village. I just finished first grade then I had to work in the farm with my family. Until now my job is just to work in the farm and plant rice and chilies.*

**A 15 year-old boy from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son, Thailand.**

*I have six family members. I finished primary school but I can't continue to higher education because there's not even a middle school in my village. It has been three years since I have stopped school, but I still want more education, which will be useful for my future.*

**A 15 year-old girl from Myanmar living the Mae Hong Son, Thailand.**

*I finished primary school, but my parents can't support me to go to middle school because of family problems. My parents sent me to the Church at the border and I have to pay for the border fee, about US\$150 per year. I can't afford the border fee. I wish I could study but I feel sad I can't continue my education and for the children in my village too because there is no school in the village. Most of us have a chance to study when we have a volunteer teacher from a local community organization, but not full time. We are not sure about our future.*

**A 12 year-old boy from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son, Thailand.**

This first challenge of being able to physical access schools does not yet address the quality of education or other obstacles to learning.

## **2.2 Problems with Teachers**

There are many issues with teachers that negatively impact students and add to their difficulties in learning. Many of the issues that we identified through this research stemmed from teachers being under-paid, not having enough resources, and not having enough training.

Monthly salaries for teachers are reported to be between US\$50 for entry-level teachers, to US\$100 for experienced teachers. This puts most teachers below the World Bank's US\$2.25 poverty line, and experienced teachers barely above it. In addition, teachers and schools receive very little government support aside from an empty building in which to hold classes. Teachers must supply their own furniture and supplies or rely on parents to help with these costs. One of the most frequent documented side-effects of low teaching salaries is corruption among schoolteachers, especially at the middle and high school level.

Teachers create extra classes, known commonly as "Tuition Classes," that students must attend. These extra classes can cost as much as US\$90 to US\$270 a year for students, an extraordinary burden for Myanmar's poor. Tuition classes are even known to continue into the university level. Many exam results are based on the amount of money students are able to pay for their tuition classes, putting poor students at a serious and unfair disadvantage for their whole future. As it was stated in the background section, what a student studies in university is determined by a final test score at the end of secondary schooling. Teachers have also been known to charge students extra money in order to participate in test taking.<sup>19</sup>

*Myanmar's education system is an exam-oriented system. Since teachers only teach for the exams, the students focus largely on memorization and do not get exposure to creative or critical thinking. This system has created the tuition class industry and corruption. With regards to resources, public schools receive resources from UNICEF and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Most teachers do not use these resources and locked them up in their classrooms. Other schools, like monastic schools, do not get as much resources as the public schools. With regards to teacher education, the government assigned many new teachers last year, but those teachers have not been educated in how to teach. In some places, like Shan State, some people became community teachers after they finish only middle school or high school. There are colleges, institutes and universities for teacher education. Those who finish college become primary school teachers and those who finish University become middle school teachers and high school teachers. This system creates a tiered system that often leads to discrimination against teachers. Those who are new teachers or who have no experience usually have to teach in Grade 1, which is an extremely important stage. When it comes to education, teachers should have training in child psychology and child rights in order to prevent abuses from occurring. As to language issues, ethnic languages are not allowed to be taught in public schools. Ethnic languages are only allowed to be taught as extra curriculum activities. Children should be able to learn in their own language. Many ethnic children fail in Burmese subjects.*

**An observation from a researcher in who traveled to many sites in Myanmar.**

*The teachers told their students to attend tuition classes, which the teachers run. If they don't, the students will not be able to pass the exam. If the students attend their tuition, they will pass the exam even if they can't actually pass it. There are others, who could teach the students very well, but the teachers do not allow their students to study with them. Even though, the teachers receive pay from the government, the villagers who have children attending school still have to provide for their food.*

**An observation from a researcher in Rakhine State, Myanmar.**

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<sup>19</sup> *Where Change Has Yet To Reach*. Rep. Thailand: Earth Rights International, 2012. Print.



*I have five children, the youngest one is only in the cradle. The two eldest girls started working in a factory after they had to quit from school. The eldest only reached eighth grade and the second eldest finished seventh grade. The other two attend primary school. One is in fifth grade and the other one is now in third grade. (He points to the girl in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, who is studying near him) next year I cannot afford for her tuition fees so she will have to end her studies this year.*

**An unemployed father of five children from Thanlyin, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*When I attended school, I didn't go to any tuition classes because of their high costs. In the end, I could not pass the exams and had to drop out of school. I don't know what to do in the future yet.*

**A male under the age of eighteen who works as a motorbike courier in Myanmar.**

*I'm supposed to attend tenth grade this year because I am already finished with ninth grade. I really want to attend school but I can't because my parents can't financially support the tuition classes. They can't do anything for me. If I don't attend the tuition classes I will not pass the exam. I want to attend the both school and the tuition class but I can't.*

**A male youth from Nyatmauk, Myanmar.**

*I want to be a mechanic in the car workshop. I must study hard and attend tuition class. If you can fix machines, you can do a lot different jobs.*

**A male youth who works in a chicken factory in Myanmar.**

*I had to move to Loikaw to study for eighth grade. It adds a lot of expenses for my living with transportation and school costs. The total expenses for each year in Loikaw is normally US\$500 per student not including the tuition classes. Therefore, there is no more choice for this year to continue to ninth grade. If there is no opportunity to study then the only thing to do is to work on the farm and help my family. This does not earn much income, so I decided to go find a job in Thailand.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I finished eighth grade before quitting school. My parents could not afford my tuition class fees and decided instead to support my older brother in his education.*

**A 15 year-old Shan and Pa'O boy living in Thailand.**

*In the past, I used to work cleaning the houses of teachers in my village, and I managed to earn enough money for school fees and transportation costs to complete eighth grade. After eighth grade I quit school. My family is poor and I have four other siblings. My parents can't afford to send me to school. They earn so little as daily wage laborers and the cost of tuition class fees is beyond their savings.*

**A 15 year-old Shan boy from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

While Myanmar's extensive cultural and ethnic diversity is something to celebrate, in the classroom setting it can cause problems. Students reported difficulties in school either because they spoke an ethnic language and the teacher taught in Burmese language, or because the students spoke Burmese language and the teacher taught in an ethnic language.

*There are a lot of difficulties for children regarding language. In their village, they learn with their own ethnic language. When they continue on to middle school or high school, they have to transfer to*

*a different town where the teachers cannot speak their language. Even some teachers who are assigned to the village cannot speak local languages and it is difficult for learning and teaching.*

**An observation from a researcher who is working as teacher trainer in Myanmar.**

*In the village I have to speak only Palaung language. There are many Palaung teachers so it's difficult for counting mathematics. When I arrived here, I only understood Burmese language.*

**A sixteen year-old girl from Man Ton Township, Myanmar.**

*We didn't have a chance to get lesson very well in village. We weren't good in English and I can't speak Burmese language. I can only understand the classes that are taught with Palaung language.*

**A 15 year-old girl from Nan Kham Township, Myanmar.**

*We have Burmese teachers in my village. But, I don't understand Burmese or what they teach. When I arrived to this nunnery it is okay for me because they speak my language.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Kutkai Township, Myanmar.**

*I want to be a nun so I came here. I also want to learn Burmese language. If I attend school in Nam Kham I can't learn that.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Nan Kham Township, Myanmar.**

*Before in my village you could study up to eighth grade. But now you can study to tenth grade. In the village, the teachers are weak in teaching. The teachers are Burmese and the students are Palaung, Shan, Chinese, and Kachin. Most of the students in my village finish school after grade four and five. If they are serious about their studies and have money, they go to Sagaing, Mandalay, or Yangon to continue their education. The others just go to find a job.*

**A 14 year-old Palaung girl from Nan Kham Township, Myanmar.**

Some problems with teachers that were reported to us were related to abuse and fear. Some students in Myanmar cite regular abuse as their reason for leaving school.<sup>20</sup>

*I was going to send my daughter to school until grade ten. We were just late to take the certificate of school transfer. We were worried that teachers would be upset with us for being late. So, we will send her to school next year and we will let her to study in this non-formal education center this year.*

**A mother from Daw Pone, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*I don't want to go to school even though my parent's can afford it. I am afraid to go to school. English subject is too hard to me to learn. Not only because of the language, but also because I am always abused by the teachers. I would rather stay home and look after my younger brother and sister. This way I don't have to be so afraid and anxious everyday.*

**A 13 year-old girl from, Bagone, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*There are eleven teachers. They are very good in teaching but if we don't get the lesson they beat us.*

**An 18 year-old Palaung girl in Myanmar.**

A lack of quality in teaching, resources, and effort were also reported.

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<sup>20</sup> *Children For Hire: A Portrait of Child Labor in Mon Areas*. Publication. Bangkok: Women and Child Rights Project, 2013. Page 38. Print.

*At library there are some books, but not enough to fill in one cupboard.*

**A direct observation by a researcher in a Karen village in Ayawaddy, Myanmar.**

*I attended school to fourth grade in my village. When I came here I had to go down a grade because the teaching was not so good in my village. They worried that I wouldn't understand the lessons and I didn't. We had to walk thirty minutes to reach the school. I don't want leave school. I wanted to attend to tenth grade, but the teachers always told me I wasn't smart enough.*

**A 14 year-old Palaung girl from Nan Kham Township, Myanmar.**

*We have two teachers from the government, but they don't put much effort into teaching and they always complain that the community is not good in their responsibilities to providing their food and school materials.*

**A community leader from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*Children should be in school because this is the only way to have a better future. Even though we have a volunteer teacher in our village, we don't have the resources to build a school so students have to study in a very old church. The volunteer has to teach several grade levels in the one room building. It is more work than one person can handle. She always looks tired, but we don't know how to help her or the students.*

**A community leader from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

A few parents who have children with disabilities shared with us that their children were turned away from the school system because teachers could not attend to the child's needs in class. Most of these parents were living in Thailand, but we know that this is also a big problem in Myanmar from another Partner's Asia report, *Presuming Competence Among All Children in Thailand and Myanmar*.

*A 13 year-old girl lives in Mayan Gone. She cannot go to school because she had a heart condition. Her mother tried to send her to the school, but the teachers did not accept her for enrollment. Even though she is 13 years old, she looks like a baby. Her body and also her brain haven't grown significantly. She couldn't read and write very well. Now she has started to learn basic literacy skills in the Non Formal Education center.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in a non-formal education center, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*Only the youngest of four children attended school. The eldest one is twenty-two years old, the middle one is twenty years old, and the youngest one is thirteen years old. They have never been to school because they were told they have learning disabilities. The father is a construction worker and the mother is a housewife. In their family, only the youngest one has ever been to school. Now he is in second grade. None of the others can read and write very well. Tyhe also can't express what they want. Their clothes are so dirty and it seems like they haven't taken a bath in a long time. The parents have never tried to send their children to other schools. The youngest one who is in schools appears to be autistic. He can't focus on what he trying to think about or study. He is always running around the classroom trying to disturb other's studying.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in North Okkalapa Twp, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*My son has Down syndrome, and I also suffer from a chronic illness. I work very hard, but my income is not enough to pay for our family daily expenses. I would like to send my son to school, but he is unable to take care of himself. He can't even say simple sentences like "I want to eat something; I want to use the restroom; I want to sleep." I think he wants to study, but there's no school that will accept him.*

**The mother of a 9 year-old Burman-Shan boy living in Thailand.**

*My husband works every day to support us, but I have to stay home and care for my granddaughter because she has Down syndrome. In 2012, my granddaughter was raped in a secondhand clothes shop in the village. It was the owner who raped her. After, we brought her to the hospital and to the court in Chiang Mai. The court sentenced the man to four years and three months imprisonment. After she came back from Chiang Mai, she attempted going to school, but her friends made fun of her, and the teachers said they could no longer give her special care. She had to leave school after only completing third grade. Now, I must stay home with my granddaughter and be with her at all times. I'm afraid someone may try to hurt her again.*

**A grandmother from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*My son has a learning disability, and his nose and eyes don't function well. He managed to finish kindergarten, but no school would accept him to study in first grade. Most of the teachers said they don't have time to give special care to my son. Now, my son is ten years old, but he is like a four year-old and is slow at learning things. Maybe if my son went to school, his intelligence and social skills would improve.*

**A parent from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

These are the predominant issues that participants identified as barriers of the education system that made it difficult for children to attend school even when they were able to gain access and afford the costs.

### **3. Family Environment**

For a variety of reasons, the home environments of many of the students interviewed for this report were also a contributing factor to children not attending school. There were many stories shared by the participants of this study. Some were similar and straightforward, while others were complicated and overlapped a complex web of issues.

The most common situations reported in this study were of school age children from poor families asked to stop their studies so that they could help support the family and their younger siblings education. Many underlying factors included: large families; family problems of divorce, separation and relocation; health burdens; general lack of interest in education from the student and/or their parents and abusive experiences.

#### **3.1 Family Size**

Today in Myanmar, women have very little access to contraceptives. Official statistics report that less than 40% of women in Myanmar use contraceptives and another reports estimates that approximately 80% of women in Eastern Myanmar, along the Thai border, have never used contraceptives. The Myanmar government and many conservative communities encourage having

many children, viewing it as a blessing, while seeing contraceptives as immoral.<sup>21</sup> Large numbers of children create immense financial burdens on Myanmar's poor population. In an already economically difficult environment, every extra mouth to feed divides precious resources and education becomes a far off dream rather than a common practice.

*I dropped out of school when I was in fourth grade. Now I am 14 years old. I live with my family of six. My sister and brother also dropped out from school. Now only my younger brother is in second grade and sister is in kindergarten. Two of my sisters are already married. My brother also got married and he has a child. I farm and help with household chores. I am expected to marry next.*

**A 14 year-old Pa'O girl from Southern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*Most of the families in this village have at least five children and most of the children are not in school.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in Ah Lone, Myanmar.**

*I had attended only up to grade three in my village. My father is an oarsman and my mother sells cookies. I have five siblings. My two elder brothers are working in a car-workshop. One of the elder brothers died when he was seventeen years old. My younger brother is now in sixth grade. I have two younger sisters; one is in grade two and another one is in kindergarten.*

**A 14 year-old boy from Yangon, Myanmar.**

*Another obstacle is most families have a lot of children making the cost of education high. These parents are often poor and have no education themselves.*

**A community leader from Myanmar in Thailand.**

*I'm going to quit school since my mother is going to give birth soon and we are in need of money. So my parents will let me work in the shrimp-processing factory. I will earn about US\$1.66 per day. I still want to continue my school but I have to work now.*

**A 16 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I am fourteen years old. I like painting and drawing. I was in grade ten in Myanmar when I had to quit school due to financial difficulty in the family. The reason my parents stopped sending me to school was because I have one younger baby sister and since my parents are working they had to send my baby sister to day care center and it was expensive. So, I had to quit school and look after my younger sister, in order to help the family save money.*

**A 14 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I am 14 years old. I was enrolled to school until fifth grade. I liked to help both at school and at home. I am well behaved, and I am the second son amongst five siblings. Though I want to continue my studies, due to financial difficulties in the family and with the concerns for the education of my other younger brothers, I quit school. I now am working a fish-processing job.*

**A 14 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I finished sixth grade and then decided I should drop out of school. My family is poor and I have a lot of brothers and sisters. I decided it was best to give up on studying and let my younger siblings have*

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<sup>21</sup> "Burmese Family Planning Left Behind." IRIN Asia English Service. N.p., 7 January 2014. Retrieved on 3 November 2014 from <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99431/burmese-family-planning-left-behind>.

*a chance to go to school. Also, my parents have already done so much for me, and I felt it was my time to begin supporting them. Now, I help my parents with picking chilies and planting onions. I tried to talk with my employer to see if I could work and study at the same time, but they refused. I have sacrificed my chance at education for my younger siblings, but I feel this is the right thing to do. My parents are old and have to work so hard to support us all. They don't really have an opinion on my education, but I think they appreciate that I am helping them now.*

**A 15 year-old Shan-Burman girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I have four siblings. I am the oldest child. My two younger sisters are twins. They are studying in fourth grade. My younger brother is studying in second grade. My youngest brother is in kindergarten. My father has gone to work in Bangkok since May. My mother is working at a gas station. I finished grade six in 2011 and didn't continue to study because we didn't have enough income for our household expenditures. I left school and started working to help lessen the burden on my parents and to support my younger siblings to study.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Myanmar living and working in Thailand.**

*My father had three more children with his new wife during his second marriage. His wife also has another child with her former husband. Now there are nine people sharing the same house, but only my father has a job to support the family. I used to study until third grade but had to leave school in the middle of the year because of our family's poor economic situation. I had to go and live with my grandparents. After my grandmother passed away I had to go and live with her aunt and help her to take care of her children. When I had the chance, I visited my mother and lived with her for a while until my mother went back to the village to apply for Thai citizenship. When I came back with my mother, my father asked me to stay to help him take care of my younger siblings.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*My older brother did not send much money for us to use. Before he married, my brother always sent money home every month. However, after he got married and had a family of his own, he didn't send any money to my parents. Therefore, I was unable to study. I finished ninth grade at a non-formal Community School. After that, my mother asked me to go and work with my brother to help support my younger sister to study. I did not want to work, but I had to go. The day I left home I cried because I didn't want to leave school and didn't want to live far from my mother.*

**An 18 year-old Pa'o girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*Since my parents got divorced and separately remarried I had to stay with my older sisters. I can't go to school since I now have so many siblings.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

### **3.2 Death and Separation**

A significant amount of students referred to the break up of the original family structure when identifying reasons for leaving school. This took many different forms, from one parent dying to two parents dying, an older sibling dying, or loss of contact with a parent who migrated. These deaths and separations affected the lives of many children in this study beyond just the emotional tolls. If a key financial provider passes in the family, in a lot of cases the children must pick up the extra slack. In situations where a parent is gone, children reported often being sent to stepfamilies often reporting neglect, verbal and/or physical abusive, and lack of attention on the children who are not from the birth family. Orphans who have lost both parents can end up being bounced around the

homes of different family members without anyone concerning themselves with the education of that child.

*The parents of seventeen year-old boy died so he was sent to live with his grandparents. He also had two brothers. His grandparents sent him to school. His grandparents and brothers then died in Cyclone Nargis. After that, he was sent to an orphanage. He lived there for four years. He continued his education until the eighth grade. After eighth grade, he could not go to school because the orphanage could not financially support him to attend school as there were too many orphans and their income could not cover his costs. Then he was sent to a religious leader where he attended a religious school. The leader could only support US\$5 and this money could not cover for the extra fees like books. He did not want to go to live with relatives, because he feared they would think he came to them for money.*

**An observation from a researcher of a 17 year-old boy in a Karen village, in Lapputa, Myanmar.**

*I have moved from Hlaing Thayar a long time ago. Now, I am living with one of my elder sisters. In the past, I lived with my other elder brothers and sisters. I have also lived with my grandmother. My mother died after she gave birth to me. My father died while he was trying to stop drinking alcohol. I only attended first grade, but I dropped out of school that first year because of financial problems. After I dropped out of school, I lived with one of my elder brothers. I worked in a car workshop. It was in Hledan region. I worked there for two years as an apprentice. Sometimes, I got bonus pocket money. They gave me food. I quit there because my boss's wife was unkind. Then, I went to my aunt who lives in Bago and stayed with her. I worked in the rice paddies there. I got some money for it. I had friends there who were in school. I wanted to attend school again. But, I was too far behind. Now, if my elder sister goes to work, I babysit and cook at home. I want to be able to repair motorbikes and cars. I have to do whatever my sister asks me. If I tease the children, she scolds me. I want to open a car workshop.*

**A 14 year-old boy from Hlaing Thar Yar, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*I work on a farm. I attended school up to third grade. I am living with my mother. She is a farmer. I have three brothers and sisters in my family. It has been three years already since the death of my father and because my mother is alone and could not provide for our needs, I left the school.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*The father had to find snails and fish at the coast of the Laputta. One day when he reached the border of the Indian ocean, he was arrested and contacted us to say he is going to jail for six years. Their mother was vendor at the village and their business was not good enough so she went to the main town. Their children were attending the school; eldest daughter was in ninth grade, the middle one was in third grade and the youngest one was studying in kindergarten. After two months, their mother got married to another man. There was no one to take care of them and feed them so they left school and went to Yangon where their grandmother lives. The eldest daughter is working at a pharmacy and the middle one is work as a mason apprentice and the youngest stays at home.*

**An observation from a researcher in a Karen Village in Laputta Township, Myanmar.**

*In my family, my brother treats my niece badly. She is a stepdaughter to my brother and is the child of his wife. Even though my parents can afford to send my niece to school, they force her to do house work like cooking and carrying water for their daily use. If they are unsatisfied, they hit her*

*seriously. Both her mother and stepfather hit her. Her eyes are even badly swollen.*

**A 12 year-old boy from Shwe Pauk Kan, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*My parents passed away when I was young so I had to live with my grandmother. I do not go to school. Because my parents passed away my grandmother lets me do as I wish so I attended school only until third grade and then stopped. Although my grandmother tells me to continue my education I don't want to. Now I make alcohol and sell it.*

**A 17 year-old Shan girl from Myanmar.**

*When I was two years old my mother left me and I lived with my father. When I was ten years old, my father died. My aunt called me to go live with her and now has me do the household chores and help. I attended school to fourth grade. I had to leave school two years ago. I can't live with my aunt so I had asked for help from the village leaders and other people and now I've come to Lasbio to work at a teashop. I've worked here for five months now.*

**A 14 year-old Shan girl from Nam Pine Village, Myanmar.**

*I finished grade five and then my father passed away and I couldn't continue my education. I have five family members and I am the youngest one. We were all working on our farm, but we still had difficulties affording food. My friend called me to work at a tea shop. I send my salary to my family. I live at the teashop and I work the whole night. I still want to learn.*

**An 11 year-old boy from Kyauk Sae village, Myanmar.**

*I have attended up to sixth grade. I didn't attend this academic year because about six months ago, my brother drowned in the river and passed way so I had to work in my brother's place. I work at the same grocery store where my brother worked. I get a salary and I can help support my parents and my younger sister. I don't want to attend school. If I attend school I can't support my parents.*

**A 12 year-old boy from Bagone, Insein, Myanmar.**

*I left school in the first grade. I have three siblings, two younger brothers and a sister. One younger brother is attending pre-k. My father divorced my mother when I was four years old. Now I collect pieces of iron with my mother and my sister. My mother also buys pieces of iron from my friends. We collect the pieces of iron around the town from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM and then return home on foot. I have a desire to attend school if I get the chance.*

**An 11 year-old Burman boy from Myanmar.**

*One reason why I had to stop school is because my parents separated and left me and my younger brother to find work in the city.*

**A 15 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Mae Hong Song, Thailand.**

*I lost my parents and I am now having problems with continuing school. I finished first grade. I had to stay with my auntie after my mother passed away, and my father remarried and left me. Therefore, my auntie brought me to her village to stay with relatives. My auntie can't financially support me with my school fees and that's why I had to leave school and help my auntie work in the farm and take care of my younger cousins when my auntie goes to work. My auntie still supports my younger brother and sister. My dream is to be an educated person and to be a nurse.*

**An 11 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Mae Hong Song, Thailand.**

*I studied until seventh grade, but after my parents died I had to quit school. Now I live with my*



*aunt and uncle, but they are poor and have their own children to look after. They cannot afford to send me to school. They do not take good care of me.*

**A 14 year-old Shan girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I studied until sixth grade and then quit. My adopted parents wanted me to continue studying, but I didn't want to. My adopted parents have two other children, and they are poor and live hand to mouth. I didn't see the use in education, and I wanted to be like my friends who were able to buy pretty outfits with the money they earned from work. My adopted mother is always drunk. It scares me. It's difficult living in the refugee camp. Everyone is poor. It's especially difficult during the rainy season because there is so little employment available. I wanted to work so I could buy my own snacks and have money to spend. I don't have real parents, so I don't have the money and support other kids have. Children with real parents have love and affection, and they get clothes and other things. I want to have things like other kids do, so I have to work for what I want.*

**A 14 year-old Shan girl from Myanmar living in a refugee camp in Thailand.**

*After I finished sixth grade, my parents got divorced and my mother married another man. Now they have a new child together, but I still live in their home. When I lived with my mother and my real father, our income was ok. Since my mother got remarried, she has spent all of my school savings to take care of her new baby because she cannot work. When this happened, my friends persuaded me to go and work with them. They told me I could have a lot of money to buy nice clothes.*

**A 14 year-old Shan girl living in Thailand.**

*I completed ninth grade, and my younger sibling is still in school. Actually, I wanted to continue studying, but my mother passed away and my father got remarried. Now, my stepmother has a new child with my father and I no longer get love from my father. My father and stepmother don't care about my education. Sometimes I feel sad because my father has a new wife and doesn't care about me anymore. Even though I want to study, I have no one to depend on. My other relatives aren't interested in me. My father told me he didn't want me to study and that it wasn't important.*

**A 16 year-old Shan boy living in Thailand.**

### 3.3 Health

For Myanmar's poor, and for migrants living in Thailand, access to health care is a major problem and the challenges around health care and consequences are another reason children are not in school. Many participants in this study noted that there was no health clinic in their village making access to healthcare extremely difficult and expensive. Participants reported traveling long distances at great costs in addition to the already high costs of healthcare in Myanmar. In 2000 the World Health Organization ranked Myanmar as the second worst country for health care in the world. Until recently Myanmar has spent less than 1% of its GDP on healthcare, and patients on average had to cover 81% of their health care costs.<sup>22</sup>

Recently the government has devoted more money to the health care system and patients now cover an average of 60% of their medical costs, an improvement, but it still places Myanmar as

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<sup>22</sup> Ferrie, Jared. "Myanmar Looks Abroad for Investment in Health Care." *The Irrawaddy*. N.p., 3 December 2013. Retrieved on 11 November 2014 from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/02/us-myanmar-health-idUSBRE9B10UZ20131202>.

the most expensive country to receive health care in Asia.<sup>23</sup> When people are very sick, they can't work, and for someone living in poverty this can mean life or death. Certainly, school becomes a very low priority. Often times a child is asked to leave school to help make money to support the family's health care needs. School fees also become unaffordable when a parent becomes sick and can't work, or a grandparent becomes sick and needs support with medical expenses.

*She was seventeen years old and HIV positive. Now, she's dropped out of school. She wants to continue her education. When she was living on the border, all of her friends knew that she was HIV positive and no one wanted to be her friend. She felt that everyone discriminated against her. The teachers from her school also knew. So, she became depressed and she stopped her education.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in Northern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*He dropped out school, because of his health problem. He would suddenly fall on his back. He would be eating or drinking and it would happen. Once it happened, it could last for as long as fifteen minutes. He has never been to clinic. His father wants him to take a medicine that he bought from somewhere. Sometimes when he was playing football, he would fall on his back again. Finally, he stopped going to school and rarely left his house.*

**A direct observation from a researcher about a 13 year-old boy from Insein Township, Myanmar.**

*I dropped out of school when I was in fourth grade. I had to quit school because of my family's problem. My mom had a stroke and we had to earn more money. I was a good student when I was in school. I got high marks and everybody loved me. When I see my teachers, I want to cry. I am working as a construction worker now.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Thanlyin, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*This girl is 13 years old. On her skin, we can see many dark spots and her tummy is proportionately bigger than her body size. Her face is pale and it seems like she is suffering from some serious health problems. Sometimes she coughs and she will have a fever too. We know that she has been infected by HIV and now she has is taking Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). Sometimes, she seems like she's in a lot of pain. We know that she has been to school and that she dropped out at the third grade. Her mother doesn't seem to take care of her well because she has five children and she is always carrying the youngest baby. Every child looks dirty and none of them wear proper cloths to cover their body. She could not take ART regularly because no one in her family takes responsibility for getting ART from the community health care center.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in North Okkalapa Twp, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*I have to cook and work on our farm. I attended up to sixth grade. Both of my parents are farmers. Since my parents were affected with AIDS, they could not look after the children and so I left school to take care of everyone.*

**A 16 year-old girl from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*I have to take a Tuberculosis tablet regularly. Because of tuberculosis, I had to quit school. My parents are farmers.*

**An 11 year-old girl from Chin State, Myanmar.**

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

*The reason I left school, even though I wanted to attend. The reason is not only that my parents are poor farmers, but also because they are infected with AIDS. The other children would tease me about my parents. I felt distressed and ashamed of my parents and so I left school. Since my parents could not work as much as other people, we did not have enough money for our livelihoods and so we have to help my parents with their work. For this reason I couldn't go back to school even if I wanted to.*

**A 16 year-old girl from a Chin village in Myanmar.**

*I didn't know myself that I was infected with HIV. After a lot of check-ups, I found out that I was HIV positive. In 2003, my father died and soon after my mother also died. Both of my parents died with AIDS. When my father died, I was six years old and my younger sister was four years. Both of us are now with our aunty. My younger sister's entire body is covered with boils. One of her eyes has no sight and both of the ears are deaf. Because of the HIV medicine, she is now becoming bald. Since she has HIV, people look down on her and so she feels unhappy and ashamed. Though she wants to attend the school, she is not able to attend the school because of the disease. Now she is helping my aunty in her inn.*

**A 14 year-old girl from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*I came to Lashio because my husband works here. I had to take my nationality registration card and my family registration card with me. When I reached here, my husband went back to Taung Gu. I didn't have any money to go back so I had to beg for the money to go back. When I got here my three daughters and I had to sleep at the Mandalay bus station for three nights. My eldest daughter now feels ill. My sons work at a motorbike workshop. I let my two daughters attend the school last year but because my eldest daughter fell ill I had to take a loan for US\$800. Now I have many difficulties paying the money back so I can't let my children attend the school.*

**A mother from Taung Gu township living in Lashio, Myanmar.**

*I live with my step-father. My eldest sister has been lost for nine years. We haven't had any connection with her. My parents work on the mountain cutting wood. I have attended grade one for three years and grade two for three years. I don't have good health so I can't attend school regularly. My family can't financially support me so I no longer go to school.*

**A 14 year-old Shan youth from Lashio, Shan State, Myanmar.**

*I have four other family members: My parents, my sister and my younger brother. I don't have any special job. My mother is at home and she has been sick for two months. My father is also at home and he can't work for my family because his leg is broken. So now, my younger sister and I collect cans and plastic bottles to get some money and support for my family. We haven't attended the school because my parents can't financially support my sister and I. I collect cans all day. Some days, I don't have anything to eat for breakfast or lunch. Sometimes I get a snack from some one and I eat it.*

**A young boy interviewed in Zeyarthiri, Myanmar**

*For the last two years I have been studying sixth grade in school. I left school halfway through the last school year but I was also taking the Thai Non Formal Education (NFE) courses and some other courses. For the last two years, my father has been working at different construction sites. My mother has worked as a housemaid. Since they could not earn enough money from the construction work, my father went to Malaysia for another job. However, after my father left, he never sent us any money and for eight months we never heard any news from him. Thus, we were facing difficulties*

*with the expenses for the rent, food, and the interest from money we had borrowed. After that we heard the news that my father had got married to a new wife and went back to the village in Myanmar. Thus, my mother was sadden and depressed by what happened. Moreover, she became sick and her health declined. That is the reason why she had to stop sending me to school and rely on me helping with the household works. When my mother recovered, both of us started working. Last year we got arrested twice because we do not have any legal documents to be in Thailand. This year we are working in a crab-freezing factory, and we earn US\$8 per day, and the boss takes about US\$17 per month as a fee for not having legal documents. Even though I want to go to school or join a course, I can't since I only have two days off a month.*

**A young boy from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand**

*The weather these days is cold and freezing, since it has been raining almost every evening. I took the raincoat and headed to the West of the school campus. Several of my former students are staying in the shelters on 14th street. When I got there, the children were running and playing in the rain. The children, my current students and also some children that are not enrolled in my school, came to greet me. I went to a house, and they offered me a soft drink. The eldest son of the family left school to work while he was in third grade, and now he is working in a frozen food processing factory. The middle child also left school when she was in fourth grade. She used to work in the same factory as her older brother but now she is working in a shrimp-processing factory. She earns around US\$20 every three days. The youngest one is still enrolled in third grade. They said the family had to stop sending the two eldest son and middle daughter to school to make them work because their grand mother became sick and the family was in need of money*

**A participatory observation by a researcher in Thailand with a family from Myanmar in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I have finished the eighth grade, but I was not able to continue school because there was not enough food and no one in the family was generating income. My parents are not able to work anymore because they are over sixty years old and they are not healthy. I believe that education is really important for my future. My dream is to improve the economic situation in our village by producing our own products.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Song region of Thailand.**

*I have five family members. I just finished the third grade, but my parents will not allow me to continue school because the family has no income. Furthermore, my whole family is unhealthy. My father has chest pains and diseases and can't work for the family. My mother is also sick, but still works for the family income. My dream is to become a medic. I really want to continue school but my parents want me to work for the family.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in the Mae Hong Son region of Thailand.**

*A boy, who used to be my student, left school and started working a construction job with his older brother. He left school seven months ago. The day he started going to work at the construction site, I saw him came out on the street. They live in the same street as me. He is my nephew's friend. He was an outstanding student. Two days before he left the school he came to my nephew and said that, "I will have to leave school, because my father suffers from diabetes, and my mother is sick as well." Three days after he talked to my nephew, I saw him coming out of the street with his older brother carrying a lunch box. He seemed to be a little bit shy and embarrassed that he was going to work.*

*Five minutes after they were waiting, a car filled with construction workers came and picked them up. He disappeared amongst the crowd of the construction workers, most of whom were adults and much older than him.*

**A direct observation by a researcher of a 13 year-old boy from Myanmar in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I was enrolled to school until fifth grade. My father was working in a rubber plantation. I am the second son of three siblings. My father began suffering from back pain and sometimes when it gets really bad I have to look after him and help him with work as well. That is the reason I left school. With my father, I have to get up at 12am and along with the other workers we have to go to the rubber plantation to collect rubber. Then we finish work at 6am. I also help work in the other processes of collecting rubber. However, we don't earn much income during rainy season since there is no work related to rubber plantation, so I have to get other random jobs, like collecting woods.*

**A 14 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*My family's situation is the main reason education is now impossible. Several years ago, my father found out he was infected with AIDS and hung himself in a cemetery. My mother remarried and became pregnant. When my mother went to the hospital to deliver her baby, she found out she was infected by AIDS as well as her new husband. When I left the temple, I began looking for work to support my mother. I am worried about her because she works so hard and gets very tired. I want to support my family, but the cost of living keeps getting higher and higher. My salary alone cannot support us all, and my mother has had to move to Chiang Mai to find employment as a construction worker. I want to take my mother's place and work construction, but I am underage and cannot get employment in the city easily. Thus, I have to work as a daily laborer in the village and look after my younger brother. My mother can only come to visit us once a month.*

**A 15 year-old Shan boy from Myanmar who has studied up to eighth grade and currently works as a day laborer in Thailand.**

*I finished sixth grade in 2012 in Sangklaburi, Thailand. I planned to study seventh grade, but I couldn't because my father became paralyzed from his waist down so now he can't help himself. My mother is also getting old and can't work any longer and has to take care of my father. Our family's income only comes from my older brother and it is not enough for all the family expenses, which include health care and medical bills for my father, water bill, electricity bill and other expenses. If I had continued my study, I would have added more financial burdens on the family. My brother earns only US\$5 per day and our family expenses are more than my brother's income. My mother, therefore, thought that since I had already finished sixth grade I was old enough to help the family so she asked me to leave school. Currently, I am working with my brother in an ice factory.*

**A 16 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Sangklaburi, Thailand.**

*I finished grade six at a school in Sangklaburi, but I did not continue to study in high school because my father was 75 years old and sick. My father suffers from joint pain and deafness so he cannot hear clearly. My mother passed away. My family has no income at all, making me unable to continue my studies. Therefore, I have to go and work with my older brother further in Thailand and send the money to my father living along the border.*

**A 13 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Ratchburi, Thailand.**

*While I was in grade one, I had to leave school because my father had an accident and there was nobody else to help my mother take care of my two younger brothers.*

## **A 12 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Pattana, Thailand.**

### **3.4 Lack of Interest**

Another common theme among participants in this study was a general lack of interest or importance placed on education. Some students, who were otherwise able to attend school, chose not to. In most countries, education is seen as a means of achieving social mobility; Better education leads to better job opportunity, which leads to a comfortable and stable life. Education is not always viewed this way among the citizens of Myanmar. With the lack of job opportunities many of those who graduated from high school or even college are working on farms with their families or migrate to Thailand to take low-level jobs. With these realities, many families fail to see the value of education.<sup>24</sup>

*According to ethnic tradition, girls don't need to be educated. For that reason, they are not interested in sending their children to school, even though they are schools available. Parents themselves are illiterate. Children have seen other children who have dropped out from school and are now living happily. They assume that they don't need to continue their education after they finish the primary level.*

#### **A researcher's observation in Rakhine State, Myanmar.**

*I live with nine family members. I have two elder brothers and two younger sisters. My sister dropped out from school when I was in first grade and my two brothers only studied at a monastic school. I left school when I was in fourth grade. Even though my parents sent me to school, I did not want to go to school. I was bored to go to school. My friends had already dropped out from school and were working. I was eager to help my family growing rice and garlic.*

#### **A 14 year-old Pa'O boy from Southern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*The school in the village only goes up to seventh grade. I quit from school to work. I am happy at work. No one forced me to quit. I want to work.*

#### **A 14 year-old Shan girl from Southern Shan State, Myanmar.**

*I wanted to attend the school, but my parents could not afford it, so I earned money by working as a housemaid for a family. I tried to continue my studies by supporting myself, but I lost interest in my study and school life because I could not keep up with all the work.*

#### **A 14 year-old boy from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*After his mother went to another country, he stopped wanting to go to school and dropped out. He says he wants to become a football player. He only studied until third grade. He is only interested in drawing and sports.*

#### **A guardian of a male child from Daw Pone, Yangon, Myanmar.**

We let her study at a free school, but she was not interested. She has no interest in studying and wanted to work. Because of that we didn't send her to school.

#### **A parent of a female child from Myanmar.**

*I told my son to attend school, but he didn't want to so I stopped. My son told me, "Mom I am the*

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<sup>24</sup> *Children For Hire: A Portrait of Child Labor in Mon Areas*. Publication. Bangkok: Women and Child Rights Project, 2013. Page 38. Print.

*tallest in my school. And then the others are very small. Among them I am the tallest and oldest. So My teacher wants me to be a class leader. I don't want to do it. I feel shy." I didn't believe him so I went to his class and asked one of the Shan girls if she knew him. She said, "Yes. He is our class leader." So I didn't tell him anything. I decided to let him work at home.*

**The mother of a boy from Myanmar in Thailand.**

*Even though we want him to study again he doesn't want to anymore. He has studied second grade for three years. He could study until second grade because our business situation was not good and we had to move often.*

**A parent of a male child from Myanmar in Thailand.**

*I attend up to fourth grade when I was in Mandalay. I have no school transcript so when we moved I could not attend grade five. My parents want me to become a professional motorbike mechanic. They tell me that they will open a motorbike repair shop for me. I have six siblings and I am the fourth one. I want to attend school so much. If I get my transcript, I will go back to school. When I see the other students who go to school I envy them and I feel sad.*

**An 11 year-old boy from Mandalay, Myanmar.**

*I have five siblings and I am the middle one. My sisters got married and my brother is too young to work, so my parents asked me not to go to school. At that time, I was in grade four and I always got A's every year. I do not want to be out of school. I want to continue my education, but my parents forced me to work as a farmer. I apologized to them and I cried a lot. I don't like feeling so tired so I decided to work as a housemaid. Before I became a housemaid, I had to do a lot of housework because my parents think that women should do housework and it is enough if they can simply read and write.*

**A 17 year-old girl from Pakoku Township, Myanmar.**

*I live with my father and my mother is getting married to another man. My father does not do any work. I am nine years old now. I have two siblings. I am the youngest one in my family. I have been to school, but only kindergarten. My mother never encouraged me to go to school.*

**A 9 year-old boy from Myanmar in Thailand**

*I am the eldest of my siblings. We all haven't attended school. My mother has been staying behind the pagoda. I don't want to attend school because my friends also don't attend school. We enjoy staying like that. I have a dream; I will work as a waiter in a teashop when I am fifteen years old. My mother also will request to the manager of the teashop for me work there.*

**A young boy from Myanmar in Thailand**

*There was a student studying in first grade here, but now he does not continue his study because he must help his parents work. He is a big boy now so he does not want to go to school. In this community, some Thai children also do not go to school. Sometimes, they will form a group to go around and play together. They encourage other children not to go to school.*

**An observation by a researcher about a boy from Myanmar who lives on Koh Khao Island, Thailand.**

*The children don't go to school because their parents are drug addicts. Many families do not value education and those who do usually do not have money to send the children to school*

**A leader from a Burman community in Pathumthani, Thailand.**

*Many of the migrants lack formal education and they do not understand the value of education. They leave their children to play around without any adult supervision all day. Sometimes the children are abused by groups of Thai youth and some of the children look like they live on the streets. There are many children who cannot access school because their parents do not value education.*

**An observation by a researcher in a Burman community in Rangsit, Thailand.**

*I came here for work and I didn't have time to send my kids to school. I will not live in Thailand for much longer because I will go back home soon. If I send my kids to school here it won't be worth it and a waste of my money. I see many children who have finished high school or college, but they come to work here. There will not be any difference if they go to school or not. They will earn the same as others who did not graduate.*

**A mother from Myanmar working in Rangsit, Thailand.**

*In the school where my son studied, he was much older than his classmates. The teacher therefore decided to send him to a different school. Sometimes he studied and sometimes he did not. He spent his time working more than studying. Then I asked him to stop school and go to work with his older sister. Since then, he has not studied again.*

**The mother of a 17 year-old Wa boy who studied in Ban Rak, Thailand.**

*Last year, I was in fourth grade at my primary school. Compared to my classmates I did quite well in my studies. However, just like the other children in the area I wanted to wander around. Thus, as soon as I completed my primary school I didn't continue on to secondary school and went to work in one of the bakery shops.*

**A 14 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I have been staying with my older sister since I was young. My father's family doesn't have a stable job or career. School is just a temporary shelter before getting a job or working. The boss and the factory owner allow us to stay and are providing some legal protection, because they are using child labor. Our parents think that children have to work from a young age.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I refuse to go to school because I have to find money to support my younger siblings due to the fact that all of my older siblings are married and have their own family to support.*

**A 15 year-old boy from Myanmar who lives in Sanglaburi, Thailand.**

*I am not interested in studying anymore. I don't enjoy living with my father because he and his wife always fight. I also have to help with the farming. I want to go and live with my aunt and help her take care of the children there.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*My parents divorced when I was six years old and my mother remarried. My father only drinks and does not take any responsibilities for the family. Therefore, I have to live with my aunt and uncle in law. I used to study in Pattana, Thailand until sixth grade but I did not finish. The reason I left school is that I was bored with studying and didn't want to study anymore even though my aunt and uncle asked me to study. Now, I just hangout with friends and sometimes I help my aunt with selling things at home and keeping records of the products whenever my uncle is away.*



**A 15 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Pattana, Thailand.**

**3.5 Abusive Situations**

In the effort to get children into school, we must acknowledge children face a abusive situations, generally caused either by employers or family members. If these children have any interest in attending school and succeeding, then it is crucial that these abusive situations are recognized and efforts are made to provide protection for these children.

*Because their family business was not good, she went to town and worked as a domestic worker. The house owner gave five month advanced salary to the girl's parents. Since then, her parents have not had any contact with her and they have no idea how to contact her. After two months one of the members of a religious school contacted us to say that the girl had many bruises and was hospitalized in Patheingyi township. Both the husband and wife had beaten the girl. Her hair had been cut randomly. The girl felt shy and shaved all of her hair. Then they thought that her behavior was insulting and they beat her legs and head with a wooden stick. They squeezed her ears and hit her body with scissors. The wife grabbed her hands and dipped them into a pot of boiled oil. At the same time, her husband beat the girl's back with the wooden stick. Her hands still cannot move, her teeth have been knocked out and there are bruises still remaining on her head, legs and entire body.*

**A direct observation made by a researcher of a 13 year-old girl from Myaung Mya Township, Myanmar.**

*Sometimes he's just teasing me and he kisses me and grabs my arms. Sometimes he touches my breasts. I told him to not to do this. I am not happy living with my family. My father beats me a lot. If he quarrels with my mom, he beats me. He'll wake me up at night and force me to make him noodles. I am too tired to do this and I just want to sleep. My mom also beats me a lot. One day I went to my friend's house and she came and grabbed me. She slapped me and when I got home, she tied up my legs and beat me with a huge stick. This wasn't just one time, I have been beaten for so many reasons.*

**A 13 year-old girl living in Insein Township, Myanmar.**

*My elder brother beats me. He slaps me under my ears. I do not dare to talk back because he is the one who will look after me if my mother dies. Sometimes, he slaps my face and it will leave a bruise. He also beats me with wooden sticks, but I never run away. I am afraid of him.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Yangon, Myanmar.**

*Sometimes we go to different places to test opium. I sometimes help my parents with their work. Yes, I really want to abstain from testing this opium but it is very difficult. I attended fourth grade. After becoming addicted to the drug I left the school.*

**A 14 year-old Chin boy from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*I am from Sittaung. We sell Win soap-suds once a week. We are forced to sell and we have to do as they order. If we have not sold our allotment, we are not allowed to return to our school. Anyway, we have no other house or place to stay and have to return to our school. Then we are scolded and beaten if we could not sell enough. Sometimes if our superior is very angry, he won't feed us anything for the whole night. We are very afraid of him.*

**An 11 year-old boy from Chin State, Myanmar.**

*It has been four months since I came to work at this teashop. Before coming here, I was working at the pub and the girls who were working there treated me unjustly. They scolded me. I would start work at 7:00 am and had to work until the last person finished drinking their beer, even if it was late. It was very tiring and exhausting so I left that pub and transferred to this teashop. Now it is worse than that pub. I have to wake up at 4:00 am to start work. Sometimes I have to wait for those who are watching the football game till 11:00 pm. In this café, if I do my work slowly, they scold and hit me. I left the school when I was in third grade. My parents are separated from each other. My mother used to drink alcohol and hit me.*

**An 11 year-old boy from Taungphila, Chin State, Myanmar.**

#### 4. Migration

Today there are government estimates of an 2.5-3 million migrants from Myanmar living and working in Thailand. In many cases, parents have brought their children with them to Thailand. As has already been shown in above sections, some students from Myanmar face similar obstacles in their pursuit of education in Thailand as their they did back home. However, others face issues that are unique to being a migrant in Thailand. Problems that migrants may face include: Having to move often to where work is available, not having proper documentation such as visas, passports or birth certificates for their children or themselves, uncomfortable social dynamics between the local Thai community, and not being able to speak Thai. Many families they faced a combination of two or more of these problems.

For example:

*When the staff went to the area, they found this family, and the kid was not in school yet because the family was going to take their kid to register at the school but because of their inability to communicate in Thai and because the teachers might ask for more documents, they took their children home without registering. Later, the staff asked about the kid but they said that they do not want their kid to study in Thailand because they will send their kid back home to Myanmar soon.*

**A direct observation from a researcher in Ban Bang Nuang, Ta Kuapa district, Pangnga Province, Thailand.**

*My family fled from Myanmar into Thailand through Rock Kha Nee. We came to Pattana village and my parents tried to find jobs to earn their livings. My family doesn't have any kind of documents so my parents were afraid to find a job that paid better because they feared that the Thai police would arrest them. They also didn't take us to enroll in school because apart from not having any legal documents, they also couldn't communicate in Thai language and also they had to look for jobs everyday. Therefore, I couldn't go to school and had to take care of my younger siblings. Later on, our neighbors took my siblings to enroll for school and also asked me to follow them. My sister and I had a chance to study at the village school. While still in kindergarten, however, we both had to leave school because our parents got a new job in Ban Dong Sak, so we had to move from Pattana village. When we moved to Dong Sak, my parents' new job was to plant vegetables in a farm near the Wang temple and there was no one to contact the school for a transcript. My parents also didn't know about the process and didn't dare to talk to the teachers so they just kept us at home to help them out. We didn't continue our school for three or four years. No one educated my parents about the school enrollment process until people from a local organization came to do field research about children not in school. They explained to us about the importance of education in*

*Thailand and children's right to education. Then they contacted with the La Sal School and took me to enroll in school. Finally, I am able to go to start school again.*

**A 14 year-old boy from Myanmar who lives in Ban Dong Sak, Thailand.**

#### 4.1 The Migrant Lifestyle

A lack of stability is a big concern for parents of migrant students. A common issue that we saw among migrants was that they move around the country often to wherever they can find work. Many are construction workers and will travel from site to site after a job is done. Some migrants work jobs, such as fishing or farming, which are seasonal, and when the season is over they move on looking for new work. With this lack of stability, parents often fail to see the value in sending their child to school for short periods of time when they anticipate moving soon.

*This family has one son and one daughter. Both of their studied at a Thai school, but since their parents had to move from place to place for their work, their children had to change school repeatedly.*

**An observation made by a researcher about a family from Myanmar living in Pangnga, Thailand.**

*Teachers at the Thai school informed us at the beginning of the school day that the boy who just moved into this school is asking for a transcript because he is going to move out of this school to go to study in another province in Thailand.*

**An observation made by a researcher in Pangnga, Thailand.**

*As I entered into the fish market I saw a boy, who used to be my student. He only went to school until grade two. He quit school just recently. He was an outstanding student, hard working with very nice handwriting. At that time, he stayed not very far from the school campus, with his grandmother. However, he stopped going to school after he moved to stay with his parents. He is now helping his mother in the fish market. When I asked his mother why he is not in school, she said now they don't want to send him to school in Thailand. But, if they can find a reliable set up for her son back in Myanmar she will she send him there to attend school.*

**An observation made by a researcher of a boy from Myanmar in the Ranong, Thailand.**

*There are many children who cannot access school. For some it is because their parents do not value the education. For some it is because they have a small amount of income and can't afford to send the children to the school. Some move often and are not stable enough to enable their children to access school. Since they are migrants their jobs are not stable and many parents move around frequently. Therefore, the children are not be able to study regularly anywhere.*

**An observation made by a researcher about children from Myanmar living in Rangsit, Thailand.**

*Ten years ago I had to ask my daughter to quit school when she was in fourth grade. I felt so bad, but as a family we didn't have any options. My husband and I came to Thailand to work and there was no one who could take care of our children back in Myanmar. So, finally we decided to bring our children with us to Bangkok. It is not easy to survive in Thailand with the whole family, but we tried to survive by working hard. Our daughter also has to work even though she is young and can't continue her education. Anyhow, our daughter loves to study and she tried hard to go to an informal*

*migrant learning center's Basic English class. I feel so sad when I see my daughter trying hard to go to school. My daughter is working at a bread factory and has only Sunday's off. She goes to school every weekend. I feel sad and know I made the wrong decision when I took my daughter out of school. Nowadays, it is not enough to only have money. Education is also very important to improve people's lives.*

**A mother of a girl from Myanmar who has lived in Bangkok, Thailand for ten years.**

*None of my children have had an opportunity to study because we migrated to Thailand. They cannot read and write. We grow seasonal vegetables to eat. We hope to save some money first before sending our children to school.*

**The mother of two children from Myanmar working on a papaya plantation in Thailand.**

*I went to primary school back in Myanmar two years ago. I left school to follow my family after my parents moved to Thailand to seek jobs. Now I'm staying with my parents in Ranong. I plan to return to school when I go back to Myanmar.*

**A 9 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Ranong, Thailand.**

*I finished the sixth grade at an informal migrant school. I haven't returned to school since the school reopened because my mother had planned that we would go back to Myanmar. So, she asked me to drop out of school and work to save money for our return to Myanmar. Almost a month after school started my mother changed her mind and we did not to return to Myanmar. We continued to live in Sangklaburi district. I want to continue my study, but because I was absent from classes for a long time I'm embarrassed and afraid that the teachers will scold me so I don't dare go to school anymore.*

**A 17 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Sangklaburi, Thailand.**

## 4.2 The Thai School System

Some parents consider the Thai school system irrelevant for their child as they plan on moving back to Myanmar soon. When a child from Myanmar attends school in Thailand they are unable to learn their own language, history and culture. There are also financial costs that accompany attending school in Thailand, including book fees, uniform fees, and transportation fees. Currently, children from Myanmar who study in Thai schools are unable to transfer their credits or certificates when they return home. If a child doesn't finish school in Thailand, then they have to start over from where they left off the last time they went to school in Myanmar. It can also be very daunting for a parent who is new to Thailand and doesn't speak Thai language to attempt to navigate the Thai school system.

*I sent my daughter to a Thai school. I wanted to go back to Myanmar, but I couldn't because I needed to wait for my daughter to graduate. I thought that it was better to send my daughter to Thai school rather than leave the child at home when I was working. At least then she can have some concept of education. Many of the parents in the area don't send their children to school and leave them at home. Most parents think that they will go back one day and they will send their children to school inside Myanmar, but they are not ready to go back and their children just waste their time. I tried to suggest to the other parents that they send their children to Thai school while they are living in Thailand. The other parents are worried about discrimination and the language barrier. In some*

*parent's experience, when their children finish to the sixth grade they will not be allowed to continue, so they think it is a waste of their time and money.*

**The father of a girl from Karen state, Myanmar, who has lived in Thailand for more than ten years.**

*Some adult students depend on the informal migrant school. I'm afraid of migrant children not getting a Myanmar education. Besides, there is a big gap between Thai education and Myanmar education. If the children complete primary level of Thai education, they cannot continue to the secondary level of Myanmar education. They have to start at the beginning of primary level when they return home. That creates a big challenge in continuing education.*

**The grandmother of a 4 year-old boy from Myanmar who has lived in Thailand for over ten years.**

*The group has been living in Thailand for more than 10 years and they know their area extremely well. There is no school for migrants and only Thai schools available. Most of the migrants in the area do not want their children to go to Thai school because they are not sure how long they will be living in Thailand.*

**An observation made by a researcher in Thailand while interviewing parents from Myanmar who live in Thailand.**

*We know education is important, but we don't know how to access it. Most of our children are school age, but we don't want to send them to Thai school because we don't think that they will be able to use it in the future. One Thai foundation also opened an informal school nearby and is preparing classes, but it will only be teaching Thai language. We want our children to learn our culture and language to prepare for a future back home.*

**A mother from Karen state, Myanmar, who has lived in Thailand for more than ten years.**

*If I send my daughter to a Thai school she can only study Thai language and my child can't study the Myanmar language, which will cause problems for my child when she goes back to Myanmar. Because we are migrant workers we can't live in Thailand for a long time. One day we will have to go back to our country and if my kids don't know and can't speak their original language it will be a problem when I go back home. As a parent, I want my kids to be educated and to have a better future, but in addition to these issues the cost of education in both Myanmar and Thailand are high.*

**The mother of a girl from Myanmar who lives in Bangkok, Thailand.**

*When we were in Bangkok I didn't attend school because my mother didn't understand about children's right. She thought that I had no right to go to school and she also didn't know what to do to get me into school.*

**A 13 year-old girl from Myanmar living in Bangkok, Thailand.**

### 4.3 Documentation

For some migrant children from Myanmar who live in Thailand, a lack of proper documentation causes many problems and makes it difficult access education. Not having a birth certificate, or a passport, or a Thai ID card limits the ability to travel (even locally) and register for school. For migrants without proper documentation who live in the rural areas of Thailand, fear of being arrested when they commute to and from the school is one of the biggest barriers to

registration and school attendance. In 2005, Thailand adopted an Education For All policy. The policy states that any child in the Kingdom of Thailand, regardless of legal status, has the right to education. However, the reality on the ground is that many government schools are unaware of this policy and the migrant children still face many challenges when they do attempt to access school.<sup>25</sup>

*I have only one child and I love him very much. Six years ago I really had a hard time sending him to school so I sent him to my village in Myanmar. Because of my income I couldn't live with my son and I had to come back to Thailand to work, but in the village no one could take care of my son and the teacher in the school also didn't teach regularly. I got stressed and I didn't know how to manage everything. Finally I decided to bring my son to Bangkok with me, but there was no school available at that time. My son doesn't have a birth certificate so he can't attend a Thai school.*

**A mother of a 12 year-old boy from Myanmar living in Bangkok, Thailand.**

*These two children are big even though they are just around ten or eleven years old. They might be too big to attend school. When we asked their mother the children's age, but she did not know because their children did not have a birth certificate. They told us that the children might be around eleven years old, but they are very big so they might not be accepted to study.*

**An observation made by a researcher about a family from Myanmar living in Phangnga, Thailand.**

*My son is five years old and he does not have a birth certificate. I also do not have a passport so I haven't started working yet. Currently we are staying with my relatives. I do not have any job or income. I want to send my son to school, but I'm afraid that I will not get a job soon so I might not have money to send him to school. Another thing is I'm still not sure how long I will stay in this area because I am looking for a job. If I get a job here then I will stay here but if I do not get a job here, I will have to move to a different place to look for a job. I am worried that my son will not be able to go to school.*

**A mother of a boy from Myanmar who lives in Phangnga Province, Thailand.**

*My son is now 20 years old. He has gone to work in Chiang Mai for several years and he doesn't go to school because he's too old for school. There are informal schools, but his home is too far, and he doesn't have a Thai ID and is afraid of being arrested.*

**The mother of a young man from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*Both of my children do not go to school because they do not have ID cards and we live far from the school. We just migrated from Myanmar about a month ago. None of us can read or write Thai, but we can understand some words.*

**A 22 year-old mother of two daughters from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*The boy doesn't go to school because he's working. It is difficult for him to travel because he doesn't have an ID card and money.*

**An observation made by a researcher about a 16 year-old boy from Myanmar who lives on an orange plantation in Thailand.**

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<sup>25</sup> "Research Assistant: Review of Migrant Education Pathways and Strategies for Sustainability." Thailand. Save the Children, n.d. Retrieved on December 2014 from <https://thailand.savethechildren.net/jobs/job-details/4>.

*Some of the migrant children are going to Thai government schools. Thai government schools need many requirements such as ID cards, passports and employment documents of the parents. Some migrants, especially those who are undocumented and works as day laborers cannot send their children to the Thai government schools.*

**The grandmother of a 4year-old boy from Myanmar who has lived in Thailand for over ten years.**

*I don't have a Thai ID card. My father has never helped me apply for citizenship. Most of my friends don't think it's important to have a Thai ID card or to study, but it is important to me. My mother supports me in wanting to continue my education, but she truly has no money to help me pay for it.*

**A 15 year-old Shan boy from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*I arrived in Thailand two years ago and have never had a chance to study in a Thai school. I'd like to study, but there are many challenges. I have a lot of brothers and sisters to help take care of. I am older than the standard age set by the school. Also, I don't have a Thai ID card, which makes studying difficult*

**A 14 year-old Shan-Burman girl from Myanmar living in Thailand.**

*My family lives on a rubber plantation in Southern Thailand. It is located aboutsevenkilometers away from the nearest village. My family works as daily wage laborers because my family is big and we cannot make ends meet. My parents have lived in Thailand for more than 20 years already but they cannot speak Thai yet because we only live on the farm. They are afraid to go to any other place and be arrested. As a result, they missed the opportunity of getting legal documents issued by the Thai authorities, which has created a problem for my siblings and I to go to school. Later on, my sister married and moved in with her husband in the nearby village. So, I moved in with my sister and had the opportunity to study. I studied in a monastery school for a couple of years, but there was no one to help me enroll in the government school because my parents don't have official documents and they cannot speak Thai. They are afraid to come to the village.*

**An 11 year-old girl from Myanmar living outside Phangnga, Thailand.**

## V. Recommendations

In March 2015, EduNet hosted its 1<sup>st</sup> Non-formal Education (NFE) Conference in Yangon in which this study's findings were presented to an audience of national and international NGOs and CBOs. With over 50 participants attending the one-day event, panel discussions and speakers represented a variety of fields including non-formal education law, education for street children, education for people with disabilities, and migrant education.

As panel discussions transitioned into small group dialogue, participants were able to candidly examine the inequities embedded in the Myanmar and Thai educational systems and identify potential pathways for reform. These recommendations have been captured in thematic categories as listed below:

### 1. Migrant Education

- Migrant education curriculums, particularly for Migrant Education Learning Centers in Thailand, need to be standardized

- Core components of migrant education curriculums should include Myanmar language, English, and Mathematics; Subjects should be taught in Myanmar language
- Increased awareness and attention by the Myanmar and Thai government is necessary in order to promote the educational rights of Myanmar children and improve their current study conditions

## 2. People with Disabilities

- Rights-based advocacy for people with disability needs to be strengthened through awareness-raising activities
- There is a need for more special education facilities for people with disabilities
- Students, regardless if they have a disability, should have the opportunity to learn basic sign language in school
- TV channels and other media sources should broadcast shows teaching basic sign language
- Current law and policy should represent the special needs of people living with disability
- More research regarding families of people with disability is necessary for improved advocacy

## 3. Vocational Training

- There needs to be increased facilities and access to vocational institutes particularly for children who are unable to study within formal educational systems
- To better promote vocational training, respective governments should provide nationally recognized certification upon graduation

## 4. Networking

- Support for children not in school could be strengthened through improved networking among NFE groups, the government, CSOs, and NGOs
- Collaboration and coordination should be facilitated through a comprehensive website that shares information, news, and resources among groups focused on supporting children not in school
- It is necessary to create a directory including the contact information and field sites of all NFE groups, CSOs, and NGOs supporting children's access to education

## 5. Policy

- Non-formal Education programs should be formally adopted through government schools; teacher unions should lead this campaign
- CSOs and teacher unions should discuss and standardize NFE curriculums to be implemented nation-wide
- NFE teachers should be ensured salary through government legislation
- There is a need for external evaluation of teaching practices which should be conducted by an education watch group



- Awareness as to the benefits of education needs to be supported by the government and presented in the media with parents acting as spokesmen
- More research needs to be conducted to capture more accurate and detailed information regarding children not in school, as well as the legal, policy, management/oversight environment surrounding them in order to plan and program more strategically in the area of education, including Non-formal Education

## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study clearly illustrates the many barriers that have resulted in a significant population of students who are unable to access education. Even with government policies of “Education for All” there are many barriers to making this a reality. There are many social and economic factors that must be recognized and addressed.

This study not only highlights the reality of children not in school, it has also facilitated teachers, community leaders and local organizations to understand the underlying factors that are keeping children out of school. The discussions among the community researchers have been invaluable to understand the extent of the problems, many of the similar dynamics and the need to collaborate for change. In addition, the data collection process allowed a deeper discussion and exchange with community members as well as children, parents and relations of their realities, concerns and expectations.

Many communities in which this study has been conducted have begun to identify education opportunities, both formal and informal. Linking these initiatives to others and getting their realities recognized and addressed by policy makers, government service providers and the international development community will be critical to getting more children into school, reducing drop out and reaching those with special needs and circumstances.

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